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THE IMPACT OF URBAN WETLAND FARMING ON FOOD SECURITY IN ZIMBABWE'S URBAN AREAS

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Abstract

This study explores the urban wetlands contribution to household food security in Zimbabwe. This is under the backdrop of hazy information which exists under the environmental importance of wetland resource discourse. The study was an ethnographic in nature which used a qualitative research approach. The study used a number of livelihood tools in food security assessment which included, direct observations, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and a household questionnaire survey, to solicit the data. A satellite town (Chitungwiza) close to Zimbabwe's capital city (Harare) was used for this study. A sum of 300 subjects from the three main residential areas namely Seke, St Mary's and Zengeza suburbs were selected for the study. Systematic sampling was used to select wetland urban farmers in each suburb, followed by random sampling which resulted in a sample size of 100 from each suburb. The results revealed that 92% of the urban farmers practice agriculture in wetlands. Sixty two percent acknowledge that they are food secure because of wetland agriculture. The main crops which are planted in these wetlands include maize, sweet potatoes, and vegetables in order of their importance. Hundred percent respondents were of the opinion that soils from wetlands are richer than those from other landscapes and therefore reducing expenses on input costs like fertilizers. About 80% of those that are food secure are women headed households. Eighty seven percent of the respondents confirmed that wetlands provide products and services that significantly contribute to their household food security. Despite the wetland's contribution, these urban farmers face some challenges which include low inputs, unreliable and erratic rainfall, unfavorable urban agricultural policies and diseases. Urban population increase around the wetlands, embedded with other anthropogenic activities, economic crisis, land shortage and climate change presents households with limited options. The study recommends urban agricultural policies that take into account the importance of wetlands as reliable agricultural landscape and reduce the construction of buildings in the wetlands. Adoptions of relevant technologies that ensure sustainable use of wetland resources for food security for example zero tillage.

Keywords: *Food security, Livelihood, Urban Wetland farming*

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