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Title: "I don't tell my husband about vegetable sales": Gender aspects of urban agriculture in Eldoret, Kenya

Issue Date: 2012-12-05

Setting the stage: Urbanization, poverty, food security, and sustainable livelihoods

Introduction

The significance of urban agriculture¹ to the livelihoods of urban households, to the well-being of individual male and female farmers, and (potentially) to the urban economy and environment in sub-Saharan Africa has gained increasing recognition in recent years. Urban agriculture has emerged as an important means of improving household food security and nutritional status, a source of complementary income and alternative employment in times of increasing economic hardships, and as a means to social and economic empowerment, especially for female farmers. And although it has been less appreciated by policy makers, the (potential) contribution of urban agriculture to the economies, environmental sustainability, and socio-political stability of urban centres has also been noted.

Yet until recently, many national governments and urban authorities viewed urban agriculture unfavourably, omitted it from urban land-use planning and restricted, even criminalized its practice through prohibitive and punitive policies, citing public health and aesthetic concerns, and the activity's supposed transitory nature and marginality to the urban economy. They perceived farming as a rural import that spoils urban beauty, an activity with little economic value to the city, and as a temporary activity that would be phased out by formal and economically productive land-uses. However, thanks to sustained advocacy of research and development practitioners, the tenacity of urban farmers, the rising urban food prices and inherent political risks, and to the realization by governments and urban authorities of the endurance of urban agriculture, the practice is fast receiv-

¹ Defined in a narrow sense, for the purposes of the present study, as the cultivation of food crops and raising of livestock within municipal boundaries. Urban agriculture and urban farming are used interchangeably in this book.

ing favourable policy attention at the global, national and city levels. Many governments and urban authorities across sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly embracing urban agriculture and formulating policies to support its development. It is expected that instituting concrete supportive and facilitative laws and policies both at the national level, but more so at the city/municipal level is an essential condition for the development of urban farming into a productive and environmentally sustainable livelihood strategy.

Despite the momentum towards pro-urban agriculture policies in sub-Saharan Africa, questions have continued to be asked by some scholars about whether urban agriculture is deserving of such policy attention and support, and whether in the first place those who practice it do actually realize the benefits commonly attributed to the activity (Webb 2011; Rakodi 1988; Ellis & Sumberg 1998). Such questions have been informed by studies that have tended to show that, for many households, urban farming makes only marginal contributions to household food and incomes (see e.g. Maxwell *et al.* 2000; van Averbeké 2007), and by the economic logic that favours allocation of scarce resources to more productive land-uses (Ellis & Sumberg 1998). The amenability of urban agriculture to urban spatial planning is also questioned on account that it is an activity in constant flux giving way to other land uses and subsequently moving into newer spaces (*ibid*).

Critics of the ‘urban agriculture bandwagon’ further point out that laying emphasis on urban agriculture *per se* diverts attention away from a more broad-based approach to urban development problems, of which urban agriculture is just one manifestation (Rakodi 1988; Bourque 2000). Consequently, pro-urban agriculture policies are viewed as an attempt by governments and local authorities to not only transfer their responsibility for urban development to poor urban residents (Sanyal 1987, cited in Hovorka 2006), but to also lock them up into a poverty trap by failing to provide better opportunities in other sectors (Hovorka 2006; Rogerson 1998). According to this logic, the benefits of supporting urban farming should be weighed against the potential benefits of supporting alternative livelihood activities and rural food production (Rakodi 1988; Ellis & Sumberg 1998; Rogerson 1998). More specifically, the point has been made that while urban agriculture policies could enhance the urban poor’s access to food in the short term (because urban agriculture is just one of many household-level responses to food insecurity), such policies may undermine overall city-wide food security initiatives in the longer-term (Bourque 2000; Ellis & Sumberg 1998).

While the wisdom and evidence underlying pro-urban agriculture policies may remain debatable (Webb 2011; Rogerson 1998), there is growing recognition that such policies must be informed by an understanding of not only what urban agriculture promises to achieve for households or even the urban economy and environment, but also what it means for those participating in it (Hovorka 2005;

Webb 2011). Gender has been identified as an important factor in mediating urban agriculture outcomes for individuals and for their households (Hovorka 2005; Flynn 2001; Mbiba 1995). However, the role of gender in shaping the functioning of the urban agriculture system has received only tangential treatment in urban agriculture research so far (Ngome & Foeken 2012). Until recently, much research has tended to assume the notion of a gender-neutral urban farmer, focusing as they often did on the household as the unit of analysis, thereby glossing over (intra-household) gendered interests of men and women. As a result of these, gender issues were not clearly articulated in urban development programmes (Hovorka 1998; Wilbers *et al.* 2004).

With only a few exceptions (e.g. Hovorka *et al.* 2009; Hovorka 2005; Ngome & Foeken 2012), recent studies that have dealt with gender have not gone beyond highlighting the various roles and responsibilities that women play in urban farming to unravel the underlying factors responsible for the gender differentials and imbalances, and how these impact the functioning of the urban agriculture system (Hovorka 2005, 2006). And much less attention has been given to the interlinkages and tradeoffs between urban agriculture and other livelihood strategies that constitute household livelihood systems and to the opportunities and constraints that these complexes present to men and women and how they shape and are shaped by gender relations. The present study was intended as a contribution in filling this knowledge gap, and to the urban agriculture policy debate. The study highlights the role of gender dynamics in urban agriculture in Eldoret, Kenya, and explores the implications of the recent urban agriculture policy initiatives for livelihood outcomes of households and for individual men and women, but also for overall urban food security and development.

Organisation of the book

The rest of this chapter contextualizes the study within the debates of urbanization, poverty and food security, highlighting the trends in population growth and urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa and what they mean for the well-being of the growing urban populations, especially in terms of food security. It then presents the Sustainable Livelihood Approach which is adapted as an analytical framework, before discussing the concept of gendered livelihoods to which I draw to augment gender analysis. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on urban agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, with particular focus on the contribution of urban farming to the well-being of farming households, individual household members, and the urban economy and environment. Literature on gender issues in urban agriculture is also reviewed and the scope of the study delineated. Chapter 3 provides background information on the study area, and describes the study methodology, analytical framework, and the study population, before reflecting

on fieldwork experiences. In Chapter 4, the vulnerability context of urban farming is discussed, focusing in particular on national and municipal-level socioeconomic and political trends and their implications for livelihood opportunities of men and women. This is followed, in Chapter 5, by a review of the national and local policy frameworks for urban agriculture, and their impact on its practice in the town. Chapter 6 examines the various urban farming and non-farming livelihood activities pursued by the farming households and their inter-linkages within the broader household livelihood systems. The level of access to, and the means by which men and women established entitlement over farming resources is the subject of Chapter 7, while Chapter 8 highlights the various benefits and outcomes that farming households and men and women derived from urban farming. Chapter 9 examines the respective roles of men and women in decision-making, and Chapter 10 highlights the gender division of labour in urban agriculture. The final chapter presents a summary of the study findings and discusses the implications for gender planning and urban agriculture policy.

Urbanization, poverty, and food insecurity

The *2009 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects* (United Nations 2010) shows that the world population is today more urban than rural. By mid 2009, an estimated 3.42 billion people lived in urban areas compared to 3.41 billion rural dwellers. The urban population is expected to grow by 84% to reach 6.3 billion or 69% of a projected world population of 9.1 billion by 2050, with over 90% of the growth occurring in the developing countries. Although it remains the least urbanized macro-region, and largely because of this, Africa has experienced the fastest urban population growth and a rapid urbanization² rate comparable only to Asia's (see Table 1.1). Africa's urban population more than doubled over two decades between 1980 and 2000, it grew at a rate of 3.3% between 2000 and 2005 and it is expected to triple by 2050. In 2009, approximately 40% of the region's population lived in urban areas. By 2050 the proportion of Africa's urban population is expected to rise to over 60% (*ibid*: 9).

These urban population growth and urbanization trends have been propelled by rural-to-urban migration, natural increase and, to a lesser extent, by reclassification of rural settlements to urban status – either due to increase in population size, downward revision of population threshold for urban settlements or urban boundary extensions. The contribution of each or a combination of any of these

² Urbanization is defined here as the increase in the proportion of a country's population living in urban areas, while urban population growth refers to the rate of change of the urban population in absolute terms (Satterthwaite 2007).

Table 1.1 Rate of urbanization and urban population growth for selected years, 1950-2050.

Region	Total population (millions)					% urban					Rate of urbanization (%)				Annual rate of urban population growth (%)			
	1950	1975	2009	2025	2050	1950	1975	2009	2025	2050	1950-1975	1975-2009	2009-2025	2025-2050	1950-1975	1975-2009	2009-2025	2025-2050
Africa	227	419	1010	1400	1998	14.4	25.7	39.6	47.2	61.6	2.32	1.26	1.10	1.07	2.44	2.59	2.04	1.42
Asia	1403	2379	4121	4773	5231	16.3	24.0	41.7	49.9	64.7	1.55	1.62	1.13	1.03	2.11	1.62	0.92	0.37
Europe	547	676	732	729	691	51.3	65.3	72.5	76.9	84.3	0.96	0.31	0.36	0.37	0.84	0.23	-0.03	-0.22
Latin America & Caribbean	167	323	582	670	729	41.4	60.7	79.3	83.8	88.8	1.54	0.78	0.34	0.23	2.64	1.73	0.87	0.34
Northern America	172	242	348	398	448	63.9	73.8	81.9	85.7	90.1	0.58	0.30	0.28	0.20	1.38	1.07	0.83	0.48
Oceania	13	21	35	43	51	62.0	71.5	70.2	70.8	74.8	0.57	-0.05	0.05	0.22	2.03	1.49	1.15	0.76

Source: *World population prospects: The 2009 revision*. New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

processes in urban population growth and urbanization has varied across the continent, between urban centres and over time,¹ just as have the rates and trends of urban population growth and urbanization. Obudho & Obudho (1994: 60) have characterized Africa's sub-regional patterns and trends as follows: "The southern region has the highest rate of urbanization; the northern region has the longest tradition of urbanization; the western region and parts of the middle region have the longest trend of urbanization; and the eastern region is the least urbanized despite its long history of colonial urbanization". Inevitably such generalizations obscure sometimes glaring differences among some states at the sub-regional level.² Urban population growth is also generally unevenly distributed within states, being concentrated in a few large urban centres – often the state capitals – which experience higher rates of growth compared to medium-sized and small towns. Over a four-decade period leading up to 1990, the population of African state capitals grew about ten-fold – from 2.5 million to 27 million – twice as fast as the rest of the urban population which, however, grew by 60 million over the same period (Miller & Singh 1994). It should be noted that while the proportion of urban population in medium and small towns may be declining vis-à-vis large cities, these settlements nonetheless continue to accommodate high proportions of the urban population. In 2009, 58% of the urban population in Africa resided in urban settlements of fewer than half a million people (United Nations 2010).

The major concern is not so much the rate of urban growth and urbanization *per se* as the fact that many national governments and urban authorities are ill-prepared and ill-equipped to tackle the challenges associated with these demographic dynamics. They lack appropriate regional planning and urbanization policies to guide the anticipated urban growth; and where these have existed,³ they have not been matched by the necessary capacity in terms of institutions, personnel and resources to implement them (UN-Habitat 2009; Potts 2009; GoK 2007). This is despite widespread apprehension among African governments

¹ Based on a review of statistics from selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Miller & Singh (1994) have noted, for example, that 'about half of the migrants of sub-Saharan Africa's rapidly growing population centres come from rural areas' and that 'lifetime migration and population growth has been much more rapid in the major sub-Saharan cities than in North African cities.'

² As for example the 2009 differences in levels of urbanization between South Africa (61.2%) and Swaziland (21.4%) in the southern region; between Tunisia (66.9%) and Sudan (39.4%) in the northern region; between Cape Verde (60.4%) and Niger (17%) in the western region; between Djibouti (76.2%) and Uganda (13.1%) in the eastern region, and between Congo (61.7%) and Chad (27.1%) in the middle region (see United Nations 2010).

³ Most of such policies have focused on decongesting major cities through the introduction of other growth poles and dispersion of economic investment through decentralization programmes. But these strategies have in most part failed to stem and much less reverse the tide of urban growth (Miller & Singh 1994).

over the current patterns and trends of urban growth and urbanization.⁴ Commenting on the pace of urbanization, attendant challenges and policy and planning responses, Obudho & Obudho (1994: 61) suggest that urban policy makers and managers “have simply been unable to grasp the implications of a population that doubles every (so often)”.

Most importantly, urban economies and indeed national economies of many African countries have not expanded as fast to meet the needs of the growing urban population in terms of formal sector job creation, infrastructure development and expansion of essential services such as housing, education, health care and sanitation. Instead, during part of the recent 50 years many African economies have in most part stagnated or even declined as their (urban) populations have grown. As the population in sub-Saharan Africa was growing at 3% and the urban population at close to 5% annually during the 1980s, national economies in the region registered an average gross domestic product (GDP) growth of less than one percent, implying a considerable decline in GDP per capita; and industrial production declined by about one percent per annum over the same period (Goliber 1994). In addition, per capita food output fell by 12% between the period 1974-76 and 1984-86 in contrast to all the other regions of the world which experienced an increase in food production (Sen 1987). Thus, while urbanization has in other regions of the world been associated with economic development and improvements in standards of living and well-being – e.g. higher income and literacy levels, longer life expectancy, and reduced mortality – in sub-Saharan Africa urbanization has instead been accompanied by economic decline and high levels of deprivation and inequality in some areas and periods (Dietz & Zaal 2001). A growing population of urban dwellers lack (adequate) access to decent incomes and basic social services and amenities – water, sanitation, housing, health, education, etc. – necessary for the achievement of high standards of living and well-being (Maxwell 1999; Shaw *et al.* 1994).⁵

In the 1980s and 1990s, this situation was exacerbated by neoliberal economic policies that were implemented by developing economies of the region at the prompting of the World Bank and IMF. Most notable of these were Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Although these reforms were designed mainly to spur economic growth, stimulate agricultural productivity and improve government efficiency as well as to integrate local economies into the global econ-

⁴ In 2009, about 75% of African governments were discontented with and wished to markedly alter the spatial distribution of their populations, compared to 57% in Asia, despite comparable rates of urbanization (United Nations 2010).

⁵ In sub-Saharan Africa, the urban population living in slums is estimated at 62%, the highest proportion anywhere in the world and nearly twice that of the rest of the developing world (UN-Habitat 2009). And such populations often lack access to clean water, durable housing or adequate living space, and suffer poor sanitation (*ibid.*).

omy and improve the balance of trade, the net effect of their implementation, at least in the short term, was the increase in socio-economic hardships among populations of most affected countries with the effects being disproportionately felt in urban areas, especially by the poor (Owuor 2006; Meikle 2002; O'Connor 1991; Rakodi 2002b; Nelson 1999). The SAPs shrunk incomes and income-earning opportunities in the formal public sector through employment freeze and drove many people out of employment through retrenchment; the removal of subsidies on basic commodities including food stuffs pushed up commodity prices⁶ causing inflation that eroded real incomes and purchasing power of the urban dwellers; and the withdrawal of the state from social service sector financing (e.g. education and health) placed these services beyond reach of the poor leading, for instance, to an increase in child mortality and school drop-out rates (Nelson 1999). The loss of social safety-nets for the urban poor occasioned by the implementation of SAPs further worsened their vulnerability (Maxwell 1999; Ibrahim 1994).

With little improvements achieved in the rural sector to expand economic opportunities and make rural areas more livable and attractive, not only did many increasingly vulnerable urban dwellers stay put in the cities and towns, they have continued to be joined there by many more people escaping poverty in rural areas, leading to the phenomenon of 'urbanization of poverty'. Brockerhoff (2000: 2) has observed that, comparable to South Asia, urban growth and urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa "has been fueled less by economic dynamism than by rural poverty and continuing high fertility, a pattern likely to continue in the immediate future." Thus, hitherto considered a largely rural phenomenon (see e.g. Owusu & Yankson 2007; Maxwell *et al.* 2000; Maxwell 1999; Shaw *et al.* 1994), poverty has increasingly come to be associated with the urban scene too; it has also become the focus of academic debate and development work especially since the 1980s (Potts 2009; Maxwell *et al.* 2000; Amis 1995; Shaw *et al.* 1994). While not underplaying the prevalence and severity of rural poverty, and notwithstanding the dearth of data on poverty incidence and trends in urban areas, many scholars have pointed out that the scale and depth of urban poverty – including chronic poverty – is more widespread than is depicted by official statistics, and is most probably on the increase (Satterthwaite 2007; Naylor & Falcon 1995; Owusu & Yankson 2007; Haddad *et al.* 1999; Mitlin 2005; Devas & Korboe 2000). They also contend that whereas structural causes of urban poverty may be similar to rural poverty, the urban poor, as shall be shown in a later section of this chapter, experience poverty and deprivation differently and their vulnerability contexts are more complex and so are their survival strategies (Satter-

⁶ For instance, as a result of the withdrawal of food subsidies in Sudan starting in 1991, prices of important food items such as bread rose by up to five times the pre-austerity prices (Ibrahim 1994).

thwaite 2007). Aside from the paucity of data on poverty, the underestimation of the scale and depth of poverty in urban areas has for instance been attributed to measurement methods that are based on income/consumption poverty lines, which do not adequately capture the cost of urban living and other particularities of urban life such as overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, breakdown of social support networks, etc. that predispose urban dwellers to poverty and ill-being in a manner unknown to rural residents (Satterthwaite 2007; Haddad *et al.* 1999; Owusu & Yankson 2007).

Although many economies experienced considerable improvements between 2000 and 2009 (Dietz 2011) and urbanization trends now suggest a slower (than previously anticipated) or stagnating urban population growth across sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations 2010; Potts 2009) – with a few urban centres even experiencing population decline – these trends do not necessarily signal a lessening of urban poverty. Mostly attributed as they are to circular or return migration, associated for example with retrenched formal sector workers returning to rural areas (Beall *et al.* 1999), the downward trends in urban population growth instead point to persistent economic hardships and livelihood insecurity in urban areas (Potts 2009). In the context of an unstable macro-economic environment and global economic challenges, the sustainability of cities in general and of livelihoods of the urban poor in particular have drawn growing attention (Lynch *et al.* 2001; Floro & Swain 2010; Maxwell 1999). Many livelihood studies across Africa have documented the negative impacts of macro-economic policies on people's livelihoods and the strategies they have adopted to mitigate deteriorating economic circumstances (Oberhauser & Hanson 2007). As noted by Maxwell (1999: 1950): "People are not passive victims – within the constraints they face, people do their best to cope, to make ends meet, to protect their livelihoods, and meet their basic requirements".

Participation in the informal sector activities – including urban agriculture – has emerged as perhaps the most important survival and coping strategy for many urban residents in sub-Saharan Africa⁷ (ILO 1990 cited by Maxwell *et al.* 2000; Sardier 2003; Kyomuhendo 1999; de Haan 2000; Krüger 1994). This stems from the fact that the sector offers diverse opportunities both for wage labour and self-employment; there are few entry obstacles and regulations; education qualifications and training are not requirements for most wage employment; and many opportunities of earning a living require limited start-up capital. However, by the same token, the sector is almost everywhere saturated and risky; income levels are mostly (although not always) low, irregular and seasonal; working conditions are poor; formal social insurance is unavailable for informal sector

⁷ According to the 1990 World Bank estimates, the informal sector provided up to 75% employment opportunities in many sub-Saharan African countries (Mabogunje 1994).

workers; and exploitation and harassment are commonplace (Maxwell 1999; Garrett 2000; de Haan 2000; Krüger 1994; Ibrahim 1994; Jaiyebo 2003; Mulugeta 2009; Manda, *et al.* 2000). In other words, for many poor urban dwellers, participation in the urban informal sector, while critical for their survival, is not necessarily a way out of poverty.

Because of the high proportions of income the urban poor spend on food, food insecurity is a necessary manifestation of urban poverty (Maxwell *et al.* 2000; Maxwell 1999; Potts 1997; Floro & Swain 2010; Frayne *et al.* 2009) and inevitably one of the most immediate concerns among the urban poor. As the incidence of urban poverty has grown so has that of food insecurity.⁸ Since urban households rely on the market for most of their food needs, food prices and access to cash incomes by households are essential for urban food security (Ruel *et al.* 1998; Maxwell 1999). In this vein, food security is framed as an access and affordability or an entitlement issue rather than simply one of supply or availability. Sen's (1987: 7) observation about rural famine has resonance in the urban context too: "If a person lacks the means to acquire food, the presence of food in the market is not much consolation. To understand hunger, we have to look at people's entitlements, i.e., what commodity bundles (including food) they can make their own". It is now widely understood that whilst urban settlements may and often do have adequate food for their inhabitants at the city/municipality level, not all urban residents are able to establish entitlements over the food leading to unequal availability of food at the household level (Ruel *et al.* 1998; Garrett 2000; Frayne *et al.* 2009; Krüger 1994; Lohnert 1994).

Over and above the 'ability to pay', accessibility of food by urban households is mediated by a host of other factors such as geography, policy, politics, social differentiation, etc. which vary in importance between and within cities. Poor road infrastructure in many informal urban settlements add to the cost of transporting food in bulk to those places making food more expensive (if it ever gets there) compared to better serviced areas. Commenting on the food situation in Khartoum in the early 1990s, Bakhit (1994) notes relative abundance of bread in the inner city and its scarcity in outlying areas. He adds that government employees rather than the poor were the main beneficiaries of subsidized grains and that "allegiance to the government ideology and affectionate proximity to its functionaries" was an important criterion for eligibility to receive subsidized food items (p. 255). In the same context, Ibrahim (1994) explains that food ration-cards were provided only to people residing in officially demarcated areas and to those employed by government and large organizations. As a consequence, the more deserving poor residents of squatter settlements and informal sector work-

⁸ For instance, a 2008 food security baseline survey in 11 cities in the SADC region put the average incidence of food insecurity at 77% of the urban poor (Frayne *et al.* 2009).

ers were excluded from food rations, obliging them “to buy those basic food items for up to five times the prices paid by the better-off town inhabitants who lived in (formally) demarcated quarters” (p. 258). A reliance on daily wages and a lack of refrigeration facilities also mean that the poor buy food in smaller quantities on a daily basis making it more expensive and subjecting them to food insecurity associated with insecure and irregular incomes and price fluctuations. The situation for households that rely on rural connections for part of their food needs can also become precarious should the supply be interrupted – for example in the event of adverse weather or civil strife in rural areas.

Despite the centrality of food insecurity to urban poverty and its obvious implications for the sustainability of cities (Frayne *et al.* 2009; Naylor & Falcon 1995) however, urban food security has not received as much attention in political and policy circles in a great many cities in sub-Saharan Africa as have other manifestations of urban poverty (Maxwell 1999) such as overcrowding, urban sprawl, the growing informal sector, deteriorating infrastructure and overstretched social amenities. Maxwell makes the point that the latter urban problems attract greater attention of national governments and urban authorities because they are more visible and of a communal nature and therefore inherent with greater political ramifications. On the other hand, in the absence of critical food shortages or sudden price increases that “affect a large number of the urban population negatively and simultaneously” to make it a political issue as happened across the continent in the 1980s,⁹ food insecurity has remained in most part a private problem that “must be dealt with at the household level” (*ibid.*: 1940). It is against this backdrop that the increasing importance of own food production by urban households through urban agriculture should be seen. The practice has widely been conceptualized as a critical component of micro-level livelihood strategies adopted by urban households to cope with dwindling incomes and rising food costs occasioned by macro-economic change. And for this reason, a sustainable livelihood (SL) approach becomes an important entry point for exploring the functioning of urban agriculture as part of a complex web of urban livelihood strategies (Rakodi 2002a; Foeken 2006). The SL approach provides analytical frameworks and concepts that are increasingly useful for examining the multiple dimensions of competing and complimentary livelihood strategies as well as intra-household relations that mediate and construct the way people integrate their livelihood sources.

⁹ Following the recent economic crisis, a few countries also experienced urban social unrest related to escalating food prices. Ngome & Foeken (2012) have counted at least five countries in West Africa alone viz. Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Senegal and Mauritania. Mozambique’s capital Maputo too experienced food riots as recently as September 2010.

Sustainable livelihood approach

Since the 1990s, the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) has not only gained popularity in poverty and development studies in rural areas (Scoones 2009; Okali 2006; Kaag *et al.* 2004; de Haan & Zoomers 2006; Bebbington 1999; Whitehead 2002), and increasingly in urban areas as well (Moser 1998; Abdalla 2008), but has also been widely embraced by governments and international development organizations in their poverty and development work.¹⁰ As currently conceptualized, the SLA is credited to the work of Robert Chambers and others in the 1980s and 1990s that focused on how poor people in rural areas of developing countries responded to and coped with adverse situations such as floods, droughts and famines, and changes in their economic circumstances.

The appeal of the SLA has been attributed to its holistic perspective on people's livelihoods, its recognition of the role of different policy and institutional contexts as well as their micro-macro linkages in shaping people's livelihoods (Bingen 2000; Oberhauser *et al.* 2004), and above all to the fact that it puts the poor and their situated agency at the centre of development discourse and practice. This contrasts with poverty and development studies which conceptualized poverty and well-being in narrow econometric terms with emphasis on income/consumption, and poor people as passive victims of structural constraints (Kaag *et al.* 2004). Emboldened by rural participatory methodologies that routinely revealed multiple manifestations of poverty and poor people's agency in affecting their conditions through diverse actions and strategies, proponents of the SLA called attention to an understanding of poverty and well-being from the totality of poor people's lived experiences and livelihood objectives as expressed by the poor themselves (Scoones 1998; Chambers & Conway 1992). Often these included not just economic/material concerns, but non-material concerns as well.

Various organizing and analytical frameworks have emerged from the SLA, highlighting different components and how they interact and inter-relate in the process of livelihood construction. The schematic presentation of one of the most widely adapted of these frameworks comprises five components, namely: the vulnerability context; livelihood assets; policies, institutions and processes; livelihood strategies; and livelihood outcomes.¹¹

¹⁰ DfID, UNDP, FAO, Oxfam, World Bank, and CARE are among organizations that have adapted the sustainable livelihood approach as a planning tool for resource management, development programmes and poverty intervention in rural areas, in particular (Thomson 2000).

¹¹ Emphasis on different components or direction of interrelations or interpretation of concepts may vary depending on the livelihood context, disciplinary background of researchers, or policy objectives of practitioners (Moser 1998).

The vulnerability context

Vulnerability – rather than poverty which is a static concept, based as it is on income and consumption indicators ‘that are generally fixed in time’ (Moser 1998: 23) – is considered a more appropriate concept in capturing the multifaceted and dynamic circumstances of poor people’s livelihoods (Moser 1998). This is based on the premise that “poverty is a condition of insecurity rather than only a lack of wealth” and that this condition is unstable and changes over time (Meikle *et al.* 2001: 1). As elaborated by Chambers (1995: 175), vulnerability “means not lack or want but exposure (to risk, shocks and stress)¹² and defencelessness.” He identifies two aspects of vulnerability, namely “an external side of exposure to shocks, stress and risk; and the internal side of defenselessness, meaning a lack of means to cope without damaging loss” (*ibid.*). The former is what is generally conceived of as constituting the *vulnerability context* in the SL framework and refers to the environment within which a livelihood system is embedded, which environment impinges on the livelihood system and over which individuals have limited or no control.

By definition contexts are fluid and prone to changes, which may occur over the long term (trends), suddenly over the short term (shocks), or in a cyclic manner (seasonality); they may be of an economic, political, social or ecological nature (Moser 1998). Some of these changes can be a source of insecurity or threat to the livelihoods and well-being of households or individuals, rendering them insecure. Others may be a source of opportunity for livelihood security. Vulnerability also encompasses the concepts of sensitivity and resilience, the former referring to the extent to which a livelihood system responds to and is negatively affected by external threats, shocks and stress, and the latter to the system’s ability for and ease of rebounding (Moser 1998). Both concepts relate to Chamber’s internal dimension of vulnerability and are central to any conceptualization of livelihood sustainability (Scoones 1998; Chambers & Conway 1992) and necessarily focuses attention on the means (in this case, assets) available to the poor, beginning with “what the poor have rather than what they do not have” (Moser 1998:1) and their inherent potential (Murray 2000) and agency rather than helplessness. It is generally believed that the broader and more diverse the portfolio of assets, the less vulnerable the people are likely to be and the more likely they are to achieve sustainable livelihoods (Maxwell *et al.* 2000; Moser 1998). A sustainable livelihood has been defined as follows:

¹² E.g. illness, loss of a family member, income failure, widespread violence, criminality and theft, job loss, decline in social support, increases in commodity prices, eviction, civil war and political violence, famine, environmental hazards such as flooding, economic crisis, etc. (Brons *et al.* 2005, Scoones 2009).

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base. (Scoones 1998: 5)

The SL approach recognises that the context in which individuals live bears profoundly on their livelihood goals and choices. It determines which assets they can gain access to, and gives meaning to the assets they command by presenting opportunities for or imposing constraints to the deployment of the assets in pursuit of a means of living and well-being. Besides changing over time, vulnerability contexts that define livelihood constraints and opportunities vary over space as well, for instance between rural and urban areas.

The urban vulnerability context

The vulnerability context of urban areas differs from that in rural areas in various ways – economic, socio-political and ecological. The most important distinguishing feature of the two contexts is the relatively high level of commoditization of urban life i.e. cash income is required in order to access almost all necessities of life – both food and non-food, including housing, water, fuel/energy, health care, sanitation, schooling, etc. Common goods or community resources/assets (e.g. water, fuelwood, wild food and medicines, etc.) associated with rural areas are mostly unavailable to urban inhabitants. Moreover, the urban poor tend to pay higher prices for their commodities and services not just in relation to the rural poor but also to the better-off in urban areas. The cost of living in cities has been estimated to be about 30% higher than in rural areas (Frayne *et al.* 2009). For this reason – and given the low asset ownership among the urban poor – labour becomes the most (sometimes only) important asset for the poor (Floro & Swain 2010; Moser 1998). The poor eke a living primarily by exchanging their labour for wages or by deploying it in own productive activities, the products of which are self-consumed or exchanged for cash.

Because of the primacy of labour and cash income in the livelihood strategies of the urban poor, the functioning of the labour market and commodity prices become critical determinants of the vulnerability context of urban dwellers. Failure to access an income earning opportunity and/or sudden increases in commodity prices put the survival and well-being of any poor urban resident and household at great risk. Yet this is not a distant reality for many urban residents in sub-Saharan African cities – despite cities being associated with greater economic opportunities and social amenities compared to rural areas. Unable to find decent and secure jobs in the formal sector that has stagnated or just not expanded fast enough, urban residents are pushed by the logic of survival to seek alternative opportunities in the informal sector to eke a livelihood and/or supplement their dwindling incomes.

But as was indicated in an earlier section of this chapter, the crowding in the informal sector of many urban areas in Africa has resulted into low incomes, which are irregular and seasonal, leading to an increase in cases of the employed poor (see Manda *et al.* 2000). Moreover, where poor urban residents engage in illegal activities or carry out their activities in prohibited areas or without necessary approvals, they expose themselves to risks of exploitation and harassment by state agencies (e.g. municipal authorities, the police, etc.). This may take the form of extortion, imposition of penalties, seizure or destruction of assets/stock (equipment, goods, livestock, crops, etc.) (see Ibrahim 1994; Devas & Korboe 2000; Abdalla 2008), which drive the poor further into poverty. Such are the constraints that poor urban residents have to contend with in their daily struggles to make a living. It does not help that urban areas are generally thought of as being favoured in service provision, and as having better standards of living and higher incomes compared with rural areas (Shaw *et al.* 1994). Thus, whenever a choice is to be made, for instance, between supporting urban or rural populations in times of hunger, more often the tendency is to privilege the plight of the latter (*ibid.*).

Moreover, because urban areas are highly integrated into the global economy, urban residents are more vulnerable to global economic crises and disruptions on the world market. For instance, any changes in food prices on the world market are felt almost instantaneously in urban areas but take longer to reverberate in rural areas, where the people grow most of their own food and whatever they purchase is normally from local markets with limited links to the world market (Stage *et al.* 2010). Furthermore, while such changes in food prices result into only marginal or negligible increases in the non-poor's food expenditures, which in any case constitute small proportions of their incomes, the changes can have a devastating impact on the livelihoods of the poor for whom food is by far the biggest household budget item.

Socially, the vulnerability of urban residents is compounded by social fragmentation and instability, and the absence of or weak social support networks and institutions (Meikle *et al.* 2001; Moser 1998). In particular, and because of cultural diversity in urban areas, social relations based on kinship ties that are instrumental in rural areas are less prevalent in urban areas. In circumstances characterized by intense competition to make a living and to access ever diminishing opportunities, social diversity may constitute a basis for tension and conflict; and for social exclusion for some and social advantage for others. This further impedes the formation of social capital, based as it is on relations of trust and social interaction and cooperation. With cultural diversity also comes diversity of livelihood preferences and strategies, and of the meanings attached to different livelihood assets and activities. But cultural diversity has its own upsides, including

the fact that it releases urban migrants from social structures and norms that confine them to particular roles, livelihood activities and behaviour patterns (Overå 2007), and which, as shall be discussed at length in a subsequent section, are responsible for gender inequalities in sub-Saharan African societies.

Urban areas are also associated with crime to a larger extent than rural areas. Criminal activities like theft, vandalism and robbery subject urban residents to income and asset losses at individual, household and community levels. Perception of risks associated with crime influence people's livelihood options in terms of the activities they can engage in to earn a living, where they may pursue these activities, what time of day, week, month etc. they may operate, etc.

Ecologically, the urban poor's vulnerability should be seen in terms of the conditions of the settlements they inhabit. Unable to afford decent housing, many urban poor move into crowded informal settlements without tenure security. The informal and illegal status of such settlements mean that they are poorly (if ever) provisioned with basic services – e.g. water, sanitation such as garbage collection and sewage connection, and health care. Besides, informal settlements are located mostly (although not always) on the margins of urban systems and in hazardous and dangerous locations prone to disasters and environmental and health risks (Amis 1995). Settlements located near industrial plants are, for instance, exposed to a variety of pollution-related diseases. Where informal settlements are regarded illegal, they become subject of constant official harassment and sometimes targets of government bulldozers (see e.g. Ibrahim 1994).

Livelihood assets/capitals

Broadly defined, assets can be categorized as either tangible or intangible (Chambers & Conway 1992). Tangible assets encompass resources (e.g. land, equipment, machinery) and stores (stocks of valuables such as money, food, household items) while intangible assets comprise claims and access. Claims refer to the appeals that people may make on a variety of actors – other people, social groups and networks, organisations, private and public institutions, etc. – for assistance when they are faced with adverse circumstances. Access on the other hand refers to the opportunity to actualize livelihood choices offered by resources or stores.

According to the SL framework, these assets or capitals are further categorized into five types – usually depicted as the 'asset pentagon' – namely *natural* capital (e.g. land, water, forests and soils); *financial* capital (e.g. savings, credit, loans, grants, etc.); *human* capital (e.g. level of education, skills, physical health and ability to provide labour); *physical* capital (e.g. machinery, housing, equipment, public infrastructure such as roads); and *social* capital (e.g. social networks of friends and neighbours, kinship relations, associations, community-based organizations).

While availability of assets is important, emphasis is placed on access as well (Mandel 2004; Bebbington 1999) for assets will be meaningless unless individuals and households can access and transform them to make a living. The saliency of access is especially true for public or communal assets – e.g. social infrastructures such as schools and health facilities, public land, water for irrigation, credit institutions, etc. – which individuals or households cannot command individual ownership of. Yet, as shall become apparent in subsequent sections, unequal power relations between, and differences in capabilities among household members make the question of access a pertinent one at the household level as well. Bebbington (1999: 2022) considers access as “perhaps the most critical resource of all” in the process of making a living. The concept of access closely relates to Sen’s concept of entitlements: “the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces” (Sen 1984, quoted in Leach *et al.* 1999: 232). People attain entitlements by transforming their endowments (i.e. ‘initial ownership’ of resources and stores) through ‘entitlement mappings’¹³ (*ibid.*).

Moreover, assets should not be conceived of as if they are unrelated to or function independent of each other (Chambers & Conway 1992). On the contrary, they are connected in manifold ways and the process of making a living involves deploying different types of assets in varied combinations, and tradeoffs between individual and various combinations of assets. As has already been stated, the relative meaning and value attached to each of these assets or a combination of them are embedded in context and vary among individuals and households depending, among other things, on their capabilities, interests and livelihood goals. Asset profiles of individuals and households also change over time as different assets are, to varying degrees, transformed, depleted, replaced, and gained.

Whereas stocks of natural assets such as land, forests, etc. are critical to rural livelihoods (Scoones 1998; Meikle *et al.* 2001), they may not be as important within urban contexts; but this will also vary within each of those sectors and will depend on livelihood objectives, options and strategies. For instance, although land as an asset in livelihood construction for poor urban households has generally been considered less significant (Rakodi 2002a; Mandel 2004), it is no doubt the primary capital asset for urban farming households. Another illustration of contextual influences on the value and meaning of assets is Moser’s (1998) asset vulnerability framework which treats housing as a stand-alone capital asset rather than subsuming it under the rubric of physical assets. She notes

¹³ For example, an individual may exchange his/her labour (endowment/initial ownership) for a wage (entitlement); in this case the exchange entitlement mapping will comprise the wage rate per time worked or amount of work done.

that ownership of a house is more than just a basic need for household consumption; it can also be converted into an important productive asset by renting out and/or using it for home-based enterprises (see also Kellett & Tipple 2000).

Social capital is considered a particularly critical asset for the poor. It is an important means of spreading and minimizing risk, and of accessing other assets essential for making a living. Kaag *et al.* (2004: 59) consider social capital as underpinning a social security perspective on livelihoods when they argue that:

(...) social isolation – not a (temporary) decline in income – is the greatest threat to livelihoods. What makes the difference between being vulnerable or not is access to systems of redistribution. In other words a lack of social relations and social networks accounts for the vulnerability of poor people.

In the absence of formal social security, making claims on their social relations for support in times of adversity is an important survival strategy for the poor. The more there are informal civic groups, social networks and relations of solidarity, reciprocity and mutual aid in an area, it is assumed, the greater the 'stock' of social capital available to individuals and to the community at large. Such a communitarian view of social capital is predicated on the existence of a strong sense of community and solidarity among community members and presumes that the outcomes of such social networks and social relations are beneficial to all. On the contrary, not all individuals benefit equally from social relations and for some individuals, social obligations towards others within the networks may actually put their own livelihoods at greater risk. Moreover, often individuals, especially in urban areas, find themselves in communities with disparate social networks and groupings, some of which are exclusivist, antagonistic or criminal and therefore derive benefits for some members of the community to the exclusion and at the expense of others (Woolcock & Narayan 2000). Individuals make the most of social capital where, in addition to strong social networks and relations within their own particularistic communities, there also exist certain levels of networking between communities that transcend social differentiation and sectarian divisions (*ibid.*).

Livelihood strategies

How much people succeed in withstanding external shocks and stresses and regenerating, sustaining or improving their livelihoods depends on the portfolio of activities they can and actually do pursue by drawing on the portfolio of assets they command. Often assets are deployed and managed in multiple and diverse ways and combinations, involving complex decision-making processes informed by perceptions of risks and opportunities associated with different livelihood options, which risks and opportunities are determined by the context. In these respect, people's capabilities are key to the success or failure of livelihood strate-

gies in achieving desired livelihood outcomes. Beyond being just human capital and people's ability to use assets to make a living, capability has been conceived of as also incorporating the meanings that assets give to individuals' worlds and how these meanings in turn shape subsequent livelihood choices (Bebbington 1999). It also encompasses the role of assets in empowering individuals 'to be and to act', and to transform the world around them, including institutional and structural constraints to their well-being (*ibid.*). Sen (1999:87) defines a person's capabilities in terms of "the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value".

Diversification of livelihood activities has been identified in livelihood literature as one of the most important livelihood strategies for poor households whether in rural areas (Scoones 1998; Whitehead 2002; Kaag *et al.* 2004), and certainly in urban areas as well (Meikle *et al.* 2001). Conceptually, diversification encompasses the portfolio of livelihood activities and options and the multiplicity of locations where these are pursued. Thanks to globalization processes, people's livelihood strategies have become increasingly complex, multi-dimensional and multi-local, straddling diverse economic, ecological, social and political contexts that obtain at multiple, often interlocking, socio-spatial scales – from the micro-level (household) through to the meso-level (community) and up to the macro-level (wider national community and beyond) (Kaag *et al.* 2004; de Haan & Zoomers 2006; Rakodi 2002a; Mandel 2004; Oberhauser & Hanson 2007). This has been captured by de Haan & Zoomers (2006: 122) thus: "today's livelihoods are based on a range of assets, income opportunities, and product and labour markets which are located in different places and interact in turn with other places, meaning that livelihoods both depend on global forces and shape them".

Since people's and households' vulnerability contexts are fluid and dynamic – and, as a consequence, so do their asset profiles, endowments, claims and entitlements change over time – livelihood strategies aimed at securing sustainable livelihood outcomes must of necessity be adaptable and dynamic. The notions of livelihood adaptability and dynamism have led some scholars to question the appropriateness of the term strategies in capturing poor people's day-to-day livelihood struggles, preferring instead the term 'pathways' (Kaag *et al.* 2004). In contention is the notion of economic rationality implied by the term strategies. It is argued that poor people's circumstances cannot afford them the luxury to make contingent plans for dealing with shocks and stresses beforehand; rather that theirs is reactive agency centred on daily (hand-to-mouth) survival. The contrary view holds that even under difficult circumstances, the poor often exhibit proactive agency: they do not simply react to changing circumstances but also take strategic decisions to secure their livelihoods in the long run (Chambers & Conway 1992; Whitehead 2002; Dekker 2004). This is captured by Dekker (2004:

1739) when, in reference to households' responses to common risks in rural Zimbabwe, she asserts that "households (...) do not just sit back and wait to see how an adverse event affects their opportunity to generate income or compels them to reduce their consumption when income is low. (...) they have developed various strategies to deal with these risks, strategies that are part of their livelihood system".

Livelihood outcomes

People pursue livelihood strategies with the aim of achieving multiple livelihood goals and outcomes (Thomson 2000; de Haan & Zoomers 2006; Maxwell *et al.* 2000; Chambers & Conway 1992; Meikle *et al.* 2001). Livelihood goals may range from coping with and adapting to changing circumstances to 'get by' in the short run, maintaining a certain level of household well-being, to improving the capacity of the livelihood system to withstand external shocks and reduce the risk of the household well-being declining in the future.

Besides the material outcomes necessary to cope with and adapt to changing circumstances – e.g. improvements in income levels, access to nutrition and food, and improvements in the asset base, etc. – people also draw on the assets they command to achieve a broader range of longer-term socio-political well-being outcomes such as self-esteem, identity, dignity, social relations and status, and personal fulfillment. When applied to women's circumstances, these two types of outcomes in essence constitute what in gender planning have come to be referred to, respectively, as practical and strategic gender interests (Moser 1989; Hovorka 2006).

Gender planning is a planning approach that aims to capture and incorporate men's and women's needs and interests into development policy interventions with a view to delivering equitable development outcomes for men and women, and to ultimately empower women (Moser 1989; Wieringa 1998). The approach is informed by the premises on gender differences in the context of livelihood construction (see below), and especially the recognition that gender inequalities characterized by women's subordination are deeply embedded in the social structure that enforces unequal social relations between men and women (Moser 1989; Wieringa 1998). One of the widely applied approaches to women's empowerment in gender planning – which has been popularized by Moser (1989) – is the distinction between practical and strategic gender needs/interests.

Practical gender needs are those needs that derive from women's experiences related to their gender roles; they "are usually a response to an immediate perceived necessity which is identified by women within a specific context", and give rise to practical gender interests which primarily focus on survival rather than challenging social structures responsible for their subordination (Moser

1989: 1803). On the other hand, strategic gender needs refer to “those needs which are formulated from the *analysis of women’s subordination to men*”, and which focus on achieving “an alternative, more equal and satisfactory organization of society than that which exists at present, in terms of both the structure and nature of relationships between men and women” (*ibid.*: 1803).

Policies, institutions and processes

The various policies, institutions and processes – both formal (e.g. laws, regulations and policies in public or private sector) and informal (e.g. cultural structures and social norms and ideologies) – that govern people’s everyday lives are a critical influence on their livelihoods. They mediate conditions under which individuals may or may not access certain assets and/or pursue certain livelihood strategies and options (Oberhauser *et al.* 2004). In other words, institutional structures are an integral part of, rather than distinct from the vulnerability context. It should be pointed out that power relations and politics inevitably underpin issues of entitlements and access to resources and opportunities and are therefore by extension embedded in policy and institutional structures. Accordingly, Scoones (1998: 12) has written thus:

Institutions (are) often fluid and ambiguous, and usually subject to multiple interpretations by different actors. Power relations are imbedded within institutional forms, making contestation over institutional practices, rules and norms always important. Institutions are also dynamic, continually being shaped and reshaped over time. They are thus part of a process of social negotiation, rather than fixed ‘objects’ or ‘bounded social systems’.

If people’s livelihoods are being constructed in diverse contexts and at multiple interlinked social and geographical scales, so too must policies, institutions and processes relevant to their livelihoods be understood as similarly operating in diverse contexts and intersecting at multiple scales. They “operate from the household to the international arena” (Rakodi 2002a: 16) and “across the public and private (...) sectors” (Meikle 2002: 37). The intersections of livelihood strategies and policies and institutions mean that changes occurring at any scale bear on the totality of the individual’s micro-context for making a living, and that emerging micro-level livelihood strategies may in turn impact the macro-meso-level policies and institutions.

Emphasis on the importance of policy and institutional arrangements and their cross-scale (macro-micro) linkages in shaping people’s livelihoods has been touted as one of the strong points of the SLA. “Because it provides a means to link macro-level processes to micro-level outcomes and responses”, Oberhauser *et al.* (2004: 206) notes, “a livelihoods approach provides us with a view into how people are coping with or adapting to economic restructuring in all its complexity.” In the wake of neoliberal socio-economic restructuring in developing

economies in the 1980s and 1990s, many livelihood studies have focused on the negative impacts of macro-economic policies on people's livelihood opportunities and the coping strategies the people have adopted at the micro-level and how these have in the process shaped the dynamics of macro-economic change (Oberhauser & Hanson 2007). However, questions about power relations and politics embedded within the policy and institutional structures within which people make a living have remained tangential to such studies (Scoones 2009; Murray 2000). At the household level – which continues to form an important focus of many livelihood studies¹⁴ – gendered power relations defined by social norms and gender ideologies embedded within the social structure are of particular significance to household livelihoods (Okali 2006), and certainly to urban agriculture, as are formal policies and institutional structures.

Gendered livelihoods

The concept of gendered livelihoods is anchored on the notion that gender is an important mediating factor in the process of securing livelihoods at the household level. It is based on a set of premises: a) men and women play different but complementary roles within their households and in the community – and because of this – they have different, sometimes conflicting, needs, preferences and livelihood goals and options (Little 1987; Oberhauser *et al.* 2004; Hapke & Ayyan-keril 2004; Kalabamu *et al.* 2005; Bless 2005; Moser 1989; de Haan & Zoomers 2003; Okali 2006); b) men and women experience poverty differently and unequally (Baden 1999); c) the social norms that ascribe statuses and roles to men and women enforce unequal power relations between the sexes thereby presenting them with different opportunities and constraints in their pursuit of livelihood strategies to meet their collective and individual needs (Bradshaw 2002; Amis 1995; Blackden & Canagarajah 2003; Mandel 2004); d) men and women benefit from and are affected by livelihood outcomes differently (BRIDGE 2001); e) gendered power relations are constructed and operate at various hierarchical contexts (household, neighbourhood, community, nation) (Kalabamu *et al.* 2005); f) owing to the dominance of patriarchy in sub-Saharan Africa, gender relations favour men over women (Blackden & Canagarajah 2003; Bradshaw 2002); and (g) the resulting power asymmetry invariably manifests itself in gender patterns of endowments and entitlements, division of labour and responsibility, decision-making, and gender division of space (Blackden & Canagarajah 2003; Apusigah 2009). I elaborate these below.

¹⁴ A focus on poor people's lived experiences and daily struggles necessarily pays attention to the local level of action – at the community, but invariably more so at the household level (de Haan & Zoomers 2006; Chambers & Conway 1992).

In many sub-Saharan African communities, men and women traditionally assume specific and distinct gender identities and statuses, and clear boundaries exist as to which responsibilities and roles men and women should assume and which tasks/activities they may perform within the household context¹⁵ and in the community (Chipeta 2005; Gwebu 2005; Nabulo *et al.* 2009). Men traditionally occupy higher social statuses as household heads and breadwinners for their households, and as the main decision-makers and community leaders. On the other hand, women are subordinate to and are therefore expected to defer to the authority of men and their role is restricted to the domestic sphere as care givers and home-keepers. It is these socially constructed gender identities and roles that underpin gender inequalities and shape men's and women's livelihood options and strategies and how they benefit from livelihood outcomes.

Compared to men, women have been shown to command limited ownership of, access to and control over property and productive assets. In many sub-Saharan African communities, gender ideologies and social norms deny women the right to equal inheritance of property such as land, the most important signifier of wealth and basis of livelihood construction in the predominantly agricultural-based economies of the region. In Nigeria, less than 20% of women own land and only about half of them have access to agricultural inputs, and less than 5% can access credit to improve their farmlands (Adepoju 2004). Ellis *et al.* (2007) report that in Kenya, farms operated by female-headed households own less than half of the capital equipment found on farms of male-headed households, and receive only 1% of agricultural credit. Only 7% of women own land in Uganda's Kampala city (Kiguli *et al.* 2003).

Women are also disadvantaged in accessing educational and training opportunities necessary for building human capital, enhancing capabilities and improving competitiveness in the job market. "In general, when the cost of education increases at the household level, families tend to prefer schooling for the boys (...) Women's lower education levels result in their lower formal labour force participation, as well as (...) lower levels of skills for women entrepreneurs" (Ellis *et al.* 2007). Their limited participation in the formal labour force is in any case concentrated in lower rungs. Women's lower education achievements also lead to lower productivity and financial returns which perpetuates women's dependency on and subordination to men. Aside from formal education, it has also been established, for example, that female farmers in Africa receive less than 10% of agricultural extension services (see *ibid.*). Added to their limited access

¹⁵ Nabulo *et al.* (2009) have pointed out that in Uganda "housekeeping, child care, nursing the sick, cooking food, and housework are a woman's responsibilities. Cooking food, for example, is culturally unacceptable for a married man" (p. 86-87). This description reverberates across most African communities.

to land and capital equipment, it is therefore no wonder that productivity per unit area would be lower on farms managed by women compared to those managed by men (Saito *et al.* 1994).

Besides being underrepresented in the formal employment sector because of their relatively low levels of education and training, women also encounter discriminatory employment and remuneration policies. They face greater difficulties than men in securing employment even when they have comparable qualifications and are generally more likely to receive lower pay for equal work.

Although formal institutions – laws and policies – have been put in place in many countries to redress gender imbalances, gender inequality has persisted in many places and the entrenched informal discriminatory gender ideologies and social norms have tended to endure. For instance, patriarchal customary law systems that exclude women from property ownership still prevail in most Kenyan communities despite the existence of statutory laws that recognize women's property rights. As Ellis *et al.* (2007: 5) have observed:

The extent to which discriminatory customary law overrides largely non-discriminatory statute law in relation to women's property rights has been a major source of judicial determination and is still an uncertain area of law. But for most women, the formal legal position is irrelevant in practice. For them justice is dispensed at the local level, without recourse to the formal courts, and customary norms apply.

Moreover, even where social structures bestow ownership rights to women, such ownership of assets does not necessarily guarantee their control over the same – and this is not restricted to patriarchal societies alone. Ishengoma (2004: 54) has observed that among some matrilineal communities in Tanzania where women enjoy greater ownership and access to resources, “the overall overseer of those resources was male: the maternal uncle.”

Because of their lesser asset portfolios and entitlements, women generally have limited livelihood options, tend to engage in livelihood activities on a smaller scale, and their livelihood strategies are, to a large extent, reliant on the support, and subject to the whims of men. Men's superior social status and socially constructed masculine identity also mean that they exercise authority over women at the household level and make and enforce decisions about what women can or cannot do or be, including how women should deploy their own labour and benefit from it. Given the differences in preferences between men and women, the manner in which and by whom decisions are made matters for household and individual outcomes (see Nitish 2004; Angel-Urdinola & Wodon 2010; Mkenda-Mugittu 2003).

Women's gender identities as home-keepers and care givers – and the reproductive activities and responsibilities they entail – confine them to the domestic space, which is socially constructed as ‘feminine’. The implication of this is that men do not normally help out with domestic chores and that if women should

participate in productive livelihood activities then such activities are usually undertaken within or in closer proximity of the home and relate to their domestic responsibilities. Generally women spend long working hours on reproductive responsibilities that are neither remunerated nor valued¹⁶ leaving them with little time and flexibility to participate in market-based remunerative opportunities, and much less to recreate (Bardasi & Wodon 2009; Blackden & Canagarajah 2003). Women's participation in such activities whether within the home or outside of it therefore exacerbates their time poverty and come with great costs to their personal well-being, and sometimes, with social stigma. For instance, on average, women in Uganda work for 15 hours compared to 10-12 for men per day; their Kenyan counterparts work 13 hours to men's 8 hours; and women's average weekly working time in Cameroon is twice more than men's (64 hours versus 32) (see Blackden & Canagarajah 2003). In some cases where women have been unable to juggle between their domestic responsibilities and livelihood activities, they have had to sacrifice their livelihood sources (see Gwebu 2005).

Despite the importance of market-based livelihood activities for women and the critical role of mobility in enhancing market access and profitability (Mandel 2004; Mwaipopo 2000), with a few exceptions such as in parts of West Africa (Overå 2007; Mandel 2004; Schultz 2004), participating in the market place, especially in activities that require great spatial mobility is generally considered inappropriate for women and those who take up such activities and 'roam about' do so at the risk of being ostracized. As such some (prospective) women entrepreneurs are forced to trade-off business opportunities for social respectability (Schultz 2004). In contrast, because of their superior endowments and entitlements, men tend to have greater livelihood opportunities, and dominate high-status and high-income livelihood activities, and enjoy greater economic autonomy. Moreover, as breadwinners and community leaders, men enjoy greater freedom to venture outdoor and to participate in market economies and community activities. As such they dominate the public space which affords them greater opportunities for networking and for accessing 'valued knowledge' and information including market information necessary for appropriating opportunities in market-based economies.

Women's supposed altruistic nature rooted in their gendered identities and confinement to the domestic sphere have also been advanced to explain their relative vulnerability. Their care-giving responsibilities expose women to direct experience of poverty and are often compelled to do whatever it takes for the sake of their children and other people under their care whenever household live-

¹⁶ For instance, it is estimated that in developing countries about 66% of female activities – compared to only 24% of male activities – are not captured by the Systems of National Accounts (Blackden & Canagarajah 2003).

lihoods come under threat such as during times of economic crisis or, for married women, when their husbands lose their sources of livelihood. Not only are women known to work longer hours, to take up multiple livelihood activities and to gear benefits thereof towards family sustenance, they may also engage in acts of self-sacrifice and take up low status and sometimes degrading (e.g. borrowing and begging) and potentially risky (e.g. prostitution) livelihood activities. In contrast, men are known to privilege personal interests and to spend their incomes on personal needs as they wish (Bennett 2005; Agarwal 1997; Hapke & Ayyankeri 2004; Ibrahim 1994). Moreover, operating outside the home most of the time and therefore removed from the direct experience of the material realities of their households, men are not as pressured to make sacrifices and compromise their social status and self-pride for the sake of family well-being when their traditional livelihood sources collapse. As Overå (2007: 556) has pointed out from his study in Accra (Ghana) “they (men) do not experience the same immediate burden of taking care of children. If they are not able to support them, they don’t”. Instead, men often respond to their loss of traditional livelihood sources and failure to provide for their households with a sense of redundancy, frustration and anger, and may even desert their families, an option that is not available for women (Narayan *et al.* 1999). Zack-Williams’ (1995) study of the experience of austerity measures in Sierra Leone found out that “women are the ones who tradition expects to make sacrifices” and that “[T]hey tend to go without food to help the family only after children have been fed do women feel they can have their meal” (p. 59-60).

With some exceptions (see e.g. Hapke & Ayyankeri 2004; Overå 2007), studies have also shown a tendency among women to diversify their livelihood activities more than men (see, for instance, Whitehead 2002, cited by Oberhauser & Hanson 2007; Kabeer n.d.; Mudimu 1996), the consequence of which is an increase in the work burden and time constraints for women. This has been observed in many urban settings across sub-Saharan Africa especially following economic hardships of the 1980s and 1990s that accompanied the implementation of economic structural reforms and which pushed many men out of their traditional income-earning opportunities (see Chipeta 2005; Narayan *et al.* 1999). And because education is a major entry requirement into the job market in urban areas compared to rural areas and into formal compared to the informal sector, for a lack of comparable levels of education to those of men, women’s livelihood activities are concentrated in the informal sector, including urban farming. As has already been observed, such activities are mostly of small-scale, low-income, low-status, risky and of a seasonal and survivalist nature, more so for women who lack apprenticeship skills and access to financial capital (Mulugeta 2009; Otunga *et al.* 2001; Nyakaana 1997). It is estimated that among non-agricultural

workers in sub-Saharan Africa, a higher proportion of women (over 84%) than men (63%) participate in the informal sector (Blackden & Canagarajah 2003). Where women were already well represented in the informal labour market as in parts of West Africa, the entry of more women as well as men in the sector meant, as Overå (2007: 542) notes in the case of Ghana, that the incomes of informal sector women “are reduced and that they can rely on male support to an even lesser degree than before”. Many studies from across sub-Saharan Africa have concluded that women and children were the hardest hit by the economic crisis and the SAPs (Adepoju 2004; Galli & Funk 1995; Iyun 1995; Zack-Williams 1995; Malatzi 1995). If the dwindling of incomes on the part of male providers increased the burden on women to provide for their families, the withdrawal of the state from social sector provisioning and from welfare programmes could only worsen women’s circumstances.

The concept of ‘feminization of poverty’

It is for the foregoing reasons that poverty has been portrayed as a phenomenon that, aside from urbanizing, is increasingly feminizing. Introduced in the 1970s (BRIDGE 2001; Angeles 2009), the concept of ‘feminization of poverty’ was popularized by feminist scholars and, until recently, became an influential, almost ‘uncontested orthodoxy’ in gender and development scholarship as well as poverty intervention work (Angeles 2009; Baden 1999). The concept was based on three supposedly self-evident premises: a) that women across the globe are overrepresented among the poor; b) that their poverty is deepening relative to men’s, and c) that the rising number of female-headed households, considered as some of the ‘poorest of the poor’, is both a manifestation and a result of a ‘feminization of poverty’ (Chant 2007; Angeles 2009; Baden 1999; BRIDGE 2001). While in some instances empirical evidence and hard statistics have been adduced in support of these propositions (Chant 2009; Adem 2002 cited in Mulugeta 2009; Adepoju 2004), on the most part claims of a feminization of poverty have largely been unsubstantiated (Mulugeta 2009; Adepoju 2004; Jaiyebo 2003; Amis 1995). Recently the central propositions that underpin this once-uncontested truism have begun to be challenged (e.g. Chant 2007; Angeles 2009).

Conceptually, critics have, for instance, questioned the characterization of female-headed households as some of the ‘poorest of the poor’, pointing out that female-headed households’ lived experiences and realities are more complex and that they are not always or everywhere poorer than male-headed households, nor can they be assumed to be a homogenous group (Angeles 2009; Chant 2007; van Vuuren 2003; Razavi 1999). Rather, that the socio-economic situation of female-headed households and/their experience of poverty are shaped by an intersection of various factors such as marital status, age, social networks, life course, ethnic-

ity, class, endowments, and social norms and gender ideologies, which need to be taken into account in understanding the poverty situation of female-headed households (Bradshaw 2002; Moser 1989). And that female-headship may in some instances by itself lead to better livelihood outcomes and well-being for women and other household members (van Vuuren 2003; Baden 1999). As elaborated by Baden (1999: 13),

(...) the processes which lead women to head households are many and in some cases this may represent a positive choice, so that the connotations of powerlessness and victimhood are inappropriate. In female headed households women often have greater autonomy and control over resources. Well-being outcomes for women and children in these households may be better than in male-headed households at the same level and income.

It has also been argued that intervention programmes based on the assumption that poverty is a largely feminine problem and which therefore focus on alleviating women's poverty situations and increasing women's access to productive resources tend not only "to simply increase women's burdens and/or perpetuate the status quo", but also to by-pass equally and sometimes more deserving poor male-headed households (Angeles 2009: 294).

But perhaps it is the narrowness of the income and consumption perspective of poverty underpinning the feminization of poverty thesis that has been the major point of contention, with critics arguing that such a perspective does not capture the multidimensional character of poverty, the existing inequalities in access and control of resources between men and women and much less, women's daily struggles and changing life course circumstances (Chant 2007; Angeles 2009; Bradshaw 2002). However, cognizant that women's increased access to productive resources may not necessarily translate into gender equality, enhanced role in decision-making or personal well-being for women, attention has been drawn to gender relations and power asymmetry at the household level that underline women's vulnerability, and mediate their experience of deprivation and pursuit of well-being relative to men. In the final analysis, even critics of the 'feminization of poverty' hypothesis agree, as Baden & Milward (1995, referred to by Baden 1999) have pointed out, that whereas women may not always and everywhere be worse-off than their male counterparts, "because of the weaker basis of their entitlements, they are generally more vulnerable and, once poor, may have less options in terms of escape".

Agency and the gendering of livelihoods

However, several studies have also shown that while cultural practices and norms continue to shape men's and women's lived experiences and livelihood strategies at the micro-level, they do not impact all men and women equally across time and space (Mandel 2004; Kalabamu *et al.* 2005; Nyanam-Okemwa 2000; Chipeta 2005; Narayan *et al.* 1999; Hapke & Ayyankeri 2004; Mwaipopo 2000).

Rather, their impact reflects an interplay of various factors including the structure of the local economy and attendant economic realities, formal (policies and legislations) and informal (social norms) institutions, and individuals' endowments and entitlements as well as personal characteristics, including those referred to above in relation to female household heads.

Mandel (2004) shows how mobility – an important aspect in the livelihood strategies pursued by women entrepreneurs in Porto Novo (Benin) – varied both between and among Goun and Yoruba women owing to differences in gender ideologies between the two ethnic groups as well as differences in class and life-course circumstances of the women. She notes, for example, that “[W]hile Goun women at every stage in the life-course may have limited mobility (...) Some women overcome these limits either by virtue of their class or by choosing to ignore social conventions associated with particular gender roles at various stages in the life-course” (p. 272). Older women and single women have also been known to enjoy greater mobility, economic autonomy and decision-making power (Hapke & Ayyankeri 2004; Mwaipopo 2000). Chipeta (2005: 48) has shown that, compared to older folks, younger men and women in Malawi's Blantyre city had a higher propensity to share both domestic and public spaces and the roles associated thereof, concluding that “there is likely to be changes of attitude to strict gender roles with increased education opportunity and exposure”.

Sardier (2003) has pointed out two important aspects of women's life in the city that shape their livelihood strategies in a manner that may challenge traditional gender roles and reconfigure gender relations. The first is that, compared to rural women, city women generally spend less time on household chores, due for example, to the relatively easy availability of water and energy sources as well as other social amenities and services – i.e. they do not walk long distances to fetch water and firewood or to access health services as is often the case in rural areas. The implication of this is that urban women experience less time constraints than their rural counterparts (see Bardasi & Wodon 2009) and have a little more time to engage in productive livelihood activities. The second is that access to these amenities in urban centres is dependent on availability of cash income. Thus, where their spouses' income is not enough to sustain the household (as is often the case), women increasingly come under pressure to also look for remunerative opportunities outside the home as has been outlined above. As a consequence of this, women have become more visible in the public space and increasingly come to assume the 'breadwinner' role for their households thereby challenging the gender division of space – i.e. the private/domestic sphere as feminine and the public arena as masculine – and the gender identity of men as breadwinners. Increasingly such 'transgressions' against social norms and gender ideologies by women, if done out of necessity and desperation to fulfil their reproductive re-

sponsibilities when men can no longer provide for their families, are tolerated, even encouraged and supported, and, as Overå's (2007) study in Accra (Ghana) showed, may even draw admiration and respect. It must be mentioned that some West African urban areas (e.g. in Ghana and Nigeria) have a long history of rich market women.

Whilst social norms and narratives tend to restrict livelihood options for men to a greater extent, men too are increasingly being pushed by economic circumstances to take up roles and livelihood activities that had hitherto been associated with the female gender both outside the home and within it (Overå 2007; Mwaipopo 2000; Nayaran *et al.* 1999; Chipeta 2005). Granted, this may be greeted with a measure of ridicule by the society and a sense of embarrassment and loss of status for those involved (Overå 2007). However, sometimes it is tolerated if undertaken against a backdrop of harsh economic realities and a lack of alternative livelihood options especially in urban settings. Besides, in comparison to the rural setting, stigmatisation for men involved in 'women' activities is less prevalent within the urban milieu since "the majority of the men who enter 'female' domains in the informal economy have migrated, and therefore perform their new roles out of sight of kin, mates and elders of their home town" (Overå 2007: 559). Nonetheless, in order to gain greater acceptability and justify their involvement in 'female activities', men have in certain instances transformed, re-interpreted and recast such activities to conform to masculine conceptions and cultural expectations of themselves as well as to their livelihood goals and personal expectations. For instance, although women traditionally dominated the informal food marketing sector in Accra (Ghana), Overå's (2007: 558) study established that more younger men were increasingly taking up operations in fast-food stands (locally known as check-check) that not only "operate late into the night, which is considered risky for women", but also incorporated "more 'modern' types of food". The tendency for men to take over, co-opt or associate themselves with women's livelihood sources once they grow in scale and/or become (more) profitable and therefore important livelihood sources for their households has also been documented (Bennett 2005; Narayan *et al.* 1999; Toriro 2009).

Studies have also documented how women in diverse contexts have, in certain instances and when it suits their circumstances, tended to exploit gender ideologies to protect their social space as a strategy of advancing their livelihood goals and interests and/or of challenging and negotiating gender norms. Mwaipopo (2000) has demonstrated how women in the Tanzanian village of Saadani resisted the government's presumably well-intentioned attempt to mobilize them into fishing – a major local and more profitable livelihood activity traditionally dominated by men – by promoting equal access for men and women to fishing grounds and equipment as a means of bridging the gender gap in participation in

local production processes. This programme raised women's acceptance in fishing and held greater prospects for enhanced incomes for women. However, women resisted this move because, in their view, it would not only transform their gender identities and increase their work burden – since men were not equally encouraged to share in domestic responsibilities – but it would also “reduce their traditional ability to control an independent (albeit lower) income” (p. 81). This illustrates the multi-dimensional nature of livelihoods and, in particular, the gendered meanings attached to different livelihood strategies and social spaces for livelihood construction as well as gender conceptions of power. As Mwaipopo (2000: 81) has pointed out,

(...) by assuming that women would attain (social and economic power) through participating in what was locally defined as the dominant arena of power, the programme failed to recognize that women themselves did not need to subscribe to a kind of power that was identified as men's. Women demanded to express and pursue their own individual discourses and practices of power.

Overall, the livelihood strategies adopted by men and women reflect intra-household and extra-household processes whereby gender relations and traditional social norms and gender identities and roles are being constantly challenged, negotiated, renegotiated, and even contested, both actively and subtly as individuals and households strive to make a living under deteriorating economic circumstances. Yet, in certain instances, the processes by which this proceeds entrench and reinforce the same norms (Oberhauser & Pratt 2004; Narayan *et al.* 1999). How these dynamics play out in urban agriculture in Eldoret, Kenya, is central to the present study.