# Summary

Urban agriculture has recently received growing attention in both scholarly and policy circles as an important component of urban residents' livelihood diversification strategies, and as a potential tool for poverty alleviation in sub-Saharan African urban areas. While urban agriculture's real value has been subject of contestation, many governments and urban authorities across sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly embracing its practice and formulating policies to support its development. And there is growing consensus that a better understanding of the significance of urban agriculture to the urban economy and environment, and of its meaning to individual participants, is essential for the development of sound policies. Although gender has been recognized as an important factor that shapes urban agriculture systems, it has received only limited attention in urban agriculture research. However, the few studies that have focused on the gender dimension have provided indicative insights into how gender ideologies mediate men's and women's preferences, roles, and opportunities in urban agriculture, and how these impact household and individual livelihood outcomes.

Informed by the sustainable livelihoods perspective and the gender planning theory, the study on which this book is based was intended to contribute to this emerging body of knowledge and to the urban agriculture policy debate. Specifically, the study purposed to answer the following question: how do gender dynamics shape the functioning of urban agriculture and the construction of livelihoods in Eldoret town, Kenya? The study was carried out in the town of about 500,000 inhabitants between 2007 and 2010, and involved interviews with key stakeholders, a survey among 160 urban farming households, household in-depth interviews among 24 households drawn from among survey participants, and six case studies.

It was apparent in Chapter 4 that urban farmers in Eldoret were exposed to various vulnerabilities. With one of the highest urbanization rates and urban growths in sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya's poor urban planning and governance coupled with many years of macro-economic decline as well as neoliberal economic restructuring have resulted into increasing levels of urban poverty. In Eldoret town, the closure of several industries and factories in the 1990s in the aftermath of structural adjustment programmes led to employment losses and redundancies in the town. In the absence of formal social security and welfare programmes to cushion them against economic hardships, urban residents in Eldoret, as in other Kenyan urban centres, increasingly turn to informal sector activities –

among them urban agriculture – to supplement their livelihoods. In some instances, and contrary to social norms, men's eroded ability to provide for their families amid economic hardships have not only led women into taking up livelihood activities in the informal sector – including in the 'masculine' public spaces – but some of them ended up becoming the *real* breadwinners for their households. However, owing largely to entrenched patriarchal customary systems and social norms, women have continued to be disadvantaged in all spheres of life and at all levels of society, despite the multiplicity of measures that the Kenya government has instituted over the years to bridge the gender gap in the development process.

Notwithstanding the importance of the informal sector to urban residents' survival in the town, however, participation in the sector comes up against many constraints, including restrictive and punitive municipal laws and policies. In the particular case of urban agriculture, it was shown in Chapter 5 that about one half of the survey respondents had at one time or another either been personally harassed or witnessed someone else being harassed by Eldoret Municipal Council (EMC) officers for farming in the town. The legal and policy framework governing urban farming generally reflected negative attitudes and greater concern about, and the need to restrict urban livestock keeping more than crop cultivation. However, the EMC had increasingly come to tolerate urban agriculture in the town and to relax its enforcement of by-laws. This had not, however, translated into concrete policy support or indeed into a positive change in official attitudes, even though the national government recently initiated policies aimed at supporting farming in Kenya's urban areas.

The study indicated that urban agriculture was a livelihood source for 22% of Eldoret residents but, as was demonstrated in Chapter 6, for the majority of the farming households urban agriculture was just one of several activities that constituted diversified household livelihood systems. Indeed, many households had initially resorted to urban agriculture upon their main income sources dwindling. Eighty six percent of the households engaged in non-farming livelihood activities (NFAs), which were mainly in the informal sector and traded off in various ways with urban farming. The type and location of NFAs taken up by men and women reflected cultural norms, gender roles, and differential capabilities and economic status of men and women. The latter mostly engaged in what have traditionally been regarded as women activities (mostly groceries, food items and essential household commodities), and compared to men's their activities were smaller in scale, highly localized and primarily for household use. Owing to their greater mobility and freedom in decision-making, female household heads were involved to a greater extent in NFAs than married women. However, because of a lack of other household members to complement the latter's efforts, the level of partici-

pation in NFAs did not vary significantly between male- and female-headed households. Household members other than spouses (in conjugal households) or female household heads were rarely involved in NFAs, and those who were did not necessarily contribute towards household incomes. In conjugal households, complementarities of livelihood activities were more common among spouses, although these did not necessarily involve complete disclosure and pooling of incomes. Rather, most men and women pursued personal, sometimes incongruent, interests concurrent with their contributions towards household well-being.

Although urban agriculture was an important component of livelihood diversification strategies for urban residents, those who could have benefitted the most from urban agriculture – i.e. the poorest of the poor – were in fact underrepresented among urban farmers, largely because of a lack of access to farming spaces. Indeed, as was apparent in Chapter 7, even those who participated in urban agriculture – and more so female-headed households – farmed relatively small plots, which were barely adequate for their needs. The plots were purchased, rented, accessed through social connections, or used informally. In male-headed households, it was mostly the male who had greater entitlement to the farming spaces. Compared to married women, female household heads had greater control and use rights over their household plots, and the former enjoyed considerable use rights over household plots with regard to urban farming compared to other land-uses (e.g. housing).

With the exception of water, access to the other farming resources – inputs, hired labour, financial capital (credit), agricultural knowledge and information, and social connections and networks – was also relatively low and varied among farming households, and between men and women. Financial support for and credit facilities specific to urban agriculture were unavailable in Eldoret, leaving urban farmers to rely on their limited savings and the sale of crops and livestock, and on social networks for investment in urban agriculture. For a lack of adequate financial resources, the level of use of market-purchased inputs was low among urban farmers, who tended to rely more on locally available (sources of) inputs. Although extension services existed in Eldoret, the urban farmers, especially women, rarely utilized them, either because of time constraints due to domestic burdens (on the part of women in particular), or because they did not see the need to do so given their small scale of production on the one hand, and their lack of knowledge about the existence of modern technologies and techniques that could boost the productivity of their small plots. As in the case of land, but with the exception of social connections and networks and locally available inputs, access to farming resources was generally skewed in favour of men and male-headed households. Compared to married women, female household heads enjoyed greater access to and control over the use of household assets/resources,

implying that – contrary to the central premises of the 'feminization of poverty' thesis – the latter enjoyed relatively better well-being opportunities compared to the former.

The urban farmers' patterns of access to farming resources underscore the point that access to and not just availability of resources is critical in livelihood construction. It was also the case that in exercising their agency to survive urban hardships, farming households did not necessarily utilize their portfolio of assets optimally to achieve sustainable livelihoods. For instance, they hardly adopted modern and space intensification farming techniques – including irrigation, despite availability of cheap water – nor engage in high-value agricultural enterprises. That the farmers lacked appropriate agricultural knowledge and information and underestimated the productivity potential of their plots underlines the limitations of over-glorifying the role of poor people's situated agency in their pursuit of sustainable livelihoods. In other words, some external (expert) intervention in the circumstances is essential in further catalyzing the urban farmers' agency towards realizing sustainable livelihoods.

In addition to a limited portfolio of assets and unsupportive municipal by-laws and policies, the urban farmers also encountered ecological and social constraints as well. Common ecological problems included pests and diseases, unreliable and variable rains, and poor soils. Social problems such as theft of crops and animals, conflicts with neighbours, and destruction of crops by animals were also experienced by the urban farmers. In most instances many of these problems were perceived differently by men and women.

Gender differences in urban agriculture were also noted in labour distribution and decision-making patterns (Chapter 9 & 10), which mostly reflected gender roles and gendered agricultural knowledge and skills. Women showed greater predisposition to farm, provided the most labour overall, were involved more – in terms of labour contribution and the choice of crops and livestock, and use of urban agriculture products and income – with subsistence crops and small livestock, and made the most decisions where farming was done on-plot, and the scale of production was relatively limited. Although men's labour contribution was lower than women's, men took greater responsibility for income-earning crops and large livestock, and were more involved with off-plot farming and where the scale of production was economically more visible. Men and women also performed specific agricultural tasks that, to a large extent, mirrored the traditional division of agricultural labour. However, many men and women showed flexibility and in certain instances crossed traditional gender boundaries to perform agricultural tasks that were traditionally associated with the opposite gender.

As other studies have tended to show, women's labour contributions and decision-making roles in urban agriculture – and, indeed, in other livelihood activities – tended to primarily benefit their households while men were themselves the primary beneficiaries of their own labour and decision-making roles. Nonetheless, women too exploited their social spaces and gender roles to negotiate personal benefits from urban farming. They used their roles as home-keepers and as the main decision makers with regard to the use of agricultural products to conceal income from the sale of agricultural products of which – with the notable exception of large livestock – they were mostly responsible for marketing. Besides enhancing their ability to perform their gender roles more effectively (i.e. to respond to practical gender needs) – especially where it leveraged their participation in income-generating activities – the concealed income enabled women to advance their personal interests (i.e. strategic gender interests) as well; it afforded them some economic independence and autonomy, self esteem, and social respectability. Women also used their labour as a fallback position in negotiating access to incomes accruing from male-controlled agricultural enterprises and in the household bargaining process more generally.

As regards its overall contribution to household livelihoods, Chapter 8 indicated that urban agriculture accounted for only small fractions of household food supplies and incomes for most farming households. Nonetheless, many urban farmers recounted numerous occasions when urban agriculture had enabled them to avert or cope with dire situations. Besides, urban agriculture's contribution to household and individual well-being was also valued in terms of its linkages and trade-offs with other household livelihood strategies, an aspect that remains largely unexplored in urban agriculture research. In any case, besides the need to enhance household food security and incomes, urban farmers turned to urban agriculture for other personal benefits, which varied between men and women. Whereas men were primarily motivated by the need to save money on food expenditure, for many women urban agriculture not only enhanced their ability to respond to their practical gender needs related to their gender roles, but also enabled them to advance their strategic gender interests.

Thus much as the limited contribution of urban agriculture to overall food and income situations of farming households may cast urban agriculture as an insignificant livelihood strategy that is undeserving of policy attention and support, in view of its multidimensional outcomes and meanings for urban farmers, a holistic perspective of urban agriculture must necessarily inform urban agriculture policy debate. The timeliness of the present study in the Kenyan context relates to the fact that the Kenyan government only recently laid the national policy foundation for a facilitative and regulatory framework for urban agriculture, whose supportive institutions and policies have yet to concretize and some are

still under consideration by stakeholders. It is therefore expected that the findings in this book will feed into the policy implementation debate.