

## **The German allotment gardens - a model for poverty alleviation and food security in Southern African Cities?**

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### **Summary**

This paper asks whether the German experience with urban allotment gardens (Kleingaerten, Schrebergaerten) in this century can be a model for Southern Africa. Potential exists for urban gardens to help Southern African cities reduce poverty and improve food security and living conditions.

Conditions of hunger and poverty were widespread in Germany and other European countries nearly 200 years ago when the first "gardens for the poor" emerged. Rapid industrialisation, accompanied by urbanisation and migration, forced large numbers of people into dismal living conditions. Urban gardens were one official response.

Allotment gardens consist of a piece of land between 200 and 400 square meters, most of them with a little shed for storing gardening tools. Allotment gardens formed a buffer for food security, especially in times of crisis. Shortly after WW II, Berlin contained 200.000 allotment gardens. Today there are still about 80.000.

The basis for a successful and permanent establishment of allotment gardens was laid through the establishment of associations of small scale gardeners in the cities (Kleingartenvereine, Schrebergartenvereine). The council provides the land, establishes a water system and eventually fences the area. The gardeners pay a small rent for the plot and have to attend to certain duties within the association. The organisation of farmers in garden associations has proved to be a good means for learning democratic rules as well. New development in most German cities heavily promote organic farming and the complete abolishment of pesticide use in public owned urban allotment gardens.

The paper concludes that in principle the adoption of the German system to some Southern African Cities might be possible. Main problems are seen in the institutional context of urban planning and municipal governments. Because of the highly diverse cultural and climatic situation local solutions are needed, e.g. with respect to water management and -harvesting, irrigation techniques, fencing facilities, small scale animal husbandry, and housing regulations. The establishment of allotment gardens is one measure to reduce poverty and site selection has to take immobility of citizens into consideration. Transport is expensive in Southern Africa and for many poor urban dwellers not affordable. Animal husbandry is still very common in Southern African Cities and closely related to cultural values and habits.

Because at present the major function of the Southern African gardens is food production, quality control of water and soils is pre-requisite for this type of land-use. The establishment of a well-trained extension service that understands the conditions of farming in the urban setting is highly recommended. Urban extension programs in Southern Africa need to be specifically targeted to women farmers ensuring fair proportional access to women, particularly poor, women-headed households. Situation analysis, availability and demand for garden areas in Southern African Cities is required initially. Aiming for sustainable production systems, the integration of organic waste recycling in gardening programmes is most desirable. First step could be to encourage the formation of small, local urban farmers associations and community partnership programmes accompanied by the establishment of trust funds to secure open spaces for food production. To facilitate financing of such programmes public private partnerships could be aimed to and the help of development agencies might additionally contribute.

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