

Innovative livestock-keeping in Ethiopian cities

As urbanisation increases in Ethiopia, city dwellers are responding in innovative ways to problems of high unemployment and opportunities of high market demand by growing crops and raising animals. Many people in poor families, especially women and youth, take these initiatives because they already knew farming before they migrated to town, or they learned it from others who were farming in town.

Wolfgang Bayer



A donkey can earn income through fetching water, flour and other goods

Urbane vegetable farming in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, is now partly in the formal sector. Eleven marketing service cooperatives of urban farmers produced almost 12,000 tons of vegetables for the city market in 2006 (Addis Ababa City Government 2006). In contrast, livestock production is mainly in the informal sector. The forms of livestock-keeping differ depending on the space and initial capital available.

SPECIES FOR SPACES

Households with more living space keep dairy cows, sheep, goats, or oxen for fattening, sometimes combined with bees and poultry. Poorer households with less space – usually in rented rooms, with several people living in one room – keep only one or two sheep or goats, or a donkey or chickens.

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Poor urban families that have little to invest usually start with chickens, which need little space, find their feed almost anywhere and bring quick returns for immediate needs. A local chicken costs about 25 Ethiopian Birr (roughly 3 USD). Families with a bit more money for initial investment (about 50 USD) buy a donkey, which can earn income through fetching water, flour and other goods.

Livestock-keepers in the larger towns face problems in obtaining feed and water for their animals. Another problem is conflicts with neighbours because of the smell of the animals and the manure. Ruminants (cattle, sheep and goats) often have intestinal problems because, to supplement their daily rations, they scavenge in urban wastes and sometimes eat indigestible plastics.

INNOVATION BY NECESSITY

In many large regional towns and cities in Ethiopia, e.g. Mekelle in Tigray Region, the municipal governments are gaining interest in urban farming. As part of their poverty-reduction programmes, they

encourage urban dwellers, especially the poor and formally unemployed, to raise “fast-return” animals. In some cases, even some technical advice and veterinary services are provided for urban livestock-keepers.

Most of the urban farmers, however, still have to depend primarily on their own knowledge and ingenuity. Faced with many problems of keeping animals in the cities, they have been obliged to find innovative ways of obtaining animal feed, water and medicines.

Some urban farmers collect residues from local beer-making, flour-mill dust, grain residues etc to use as feed. Some collect grass or tree foliage from woody areas in and around the town. Others access feed by taking waste from vegetable markets; this also helps to keep the marketplaces clean.

Only better-off urban dwellers can afford to give tap water to their animals.

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Although the water of rivers and streams is often polluted, many poorer livestock-keepers use these sources, but they prefer to use springs. Some have innovated by feeding residues from local beer-making, which have high water content.

Most urban farmers of rural origin have traditional knowledge about treating animal diseases, e.g. chopping and mixing local plants to control lice in chickens; or using the flesh of Ire (an Aloe species) to treat bloat in cattle. Some farmers without traditional knowledge use modern (chemical) human medicines such as Ampicillin and Tetracycline as an immediate measure for sick sheep or goats.

People who keep large ruminants (especially cattle) sell the manure for use as fuel or compost, or use it at home to reduce their fuel expenses. Youth groups collect manure and other urban waste from city streets and compounds and make compost that they either use in gardening or sell to other growers of vegetables or flowers.

RURAL LEARNING FROM URBAN LIVESTOCK-KEEPERS

Innovations made by urban people are showing also rural people new possibilities. Grazing by unattended livestock is a problem in many parts of rural Ethiopia. Without extension support, urban livestock-keepers have developed systems of tethering and cut-and-carry feeding. Government extension agencies use these urban examples to show farmers living near towns the importance of controlled grazing. Also the innovative feedstuffs such as vegetable wastes provide examples to rural farmers.

In some cases, the women's and youth groups keeping livestock in towns, e.g. in Addis Ababa and in some municipalities in Tigray Region, have been successful in building up their animal numbers. Some youth have accumulated so many animals that they want to go back to rural areas to have easier access to feed and more space for the livestock. This illustrates the cycles of innovation and development in urban farming that can even lead to urban-to-rural migration.

Reference

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Yilma Getachew 1950-2007



Yilma Getachew, sharing experiences on vegetable farming in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

It is with great sadness that we announce the loss of Yilma Getachew who passed away in 2007. For all those of us who were fortunate enough to have worked with such a dignified and knowledgeable practitioner, there is no questioning the prolific role that Yilma played in the development of urban agriculture, as an activist, researcher, teacher, innovator and pioneer of the urban field. With over thirty years of work experience as a researcher, lecturer, rural development practitioner and writer Yilma dedicated his life to food security issues and in particular the development of innovative grass root technologies in both the rural and urban settings. But his greatest passion was the small food-producing garden. Growing walls, container gardening, intercropping with legumes, basket composting, manure tea and organic waste recycling were some of the technologies that he promoted but always holistically and in one garden or on one plot. Yilma's greatest challenge was to develop gardens that could sustain poor families on the smallest possible plot size, using an approach that Yilma referred to as bio-intensive gardening. His own homegarden in Addis Ababa bore testament to this approach.

A. Adam-Bradford



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