The Problem Setting:

The growth of urban farming during the last two decades is generally considered as a response – particularly but certainly not only by the urban poor – to the declining economic situation. For some urban social categories, agricultural activities are extremely important, in the sense that it is part of a strategy of income diversification necessary to make a living or even to “survive”. The main objectives of this study are to:

a) determine the scope of farming within the municipality of Nakuru;
b) determine the importance of urban farming for the food security and income situation of the households involved;
c) assess the interrelationships between the different aspects of urban agriculture; and
d) assess the importance of rural food and income sources for the urban households.

In order to fulfil the objectives, a general survey was carried out in June-July 1999. A representative sample of 594 households was interviewed. Information was gathered using a largely pre-coded questionnaire. Information was collected on demographic characteristics of the household; migration history of the head of the household and his spouse; economic activities of all the household members in 1998; crop cultivation in Nakuru town; livestock keeping in Nakuru town; agricultural activities outside Nakuru town; and the general food security situation.

The Study Area:

Nakuru, the fourth largest town in Kenya, is about 150 kms North-West of Nairobi. It is located in the Rift Valley, within the rich agricultural highlands, formerly known as “the white highlands”. Locally, the town is sandwiched between the scenic Menengai crater and the Lake Nakuru National Park. Some of the major factors that have influenced Nakuru’s growth are its attractive climate and central location (along the Kenya-Uganda railway and the Trans-African Highway). The total area of the municipality is about 300 square kilometres, out of which 40 square kilometres is covered by the Lake. It has a population of 228,000 people with an annual growth rate of 5.7%. Apart from playing an administrative role (being both a Provincial and District headquarters), the town serves as the centre for agro-based industrial and manufacturing activities for its immediate rich agricultural hinterland. It is also a regional commercial and service centre, communication centre and a well-known tourist destination. The rapid expansion of the town both in terms of population and boundary changes has led to the emergence peri-urban areas where agriculture is practised adjacent to other urban activities. However, Northward and Southward expansion of the town is constrained by the imposing Menengai Crater and Lake Nakuru National Park, respectively. Farming activities (both growing of crops and keeping of animals) can be spotted in nearly all parts of the municipality despite the fact that municipal by-laws and the public health act prohibits the activity.

An important thing to note is that Nakuru is one of the three towns in the world where Localizing Agenda 21 (LA 21) is being implemented. The objective of the programme is to develop a new approach towards urban planning and management, focusing on an environmentally-conscious development of Nakuru Town (“People’s Green City”). One of the visions being translating Nakuru into an “eco-town”, integrating natural and human settlement imperatives. Inevitably, urban agriculture is an integral part of this “vision”. Urban agriculture is a fact of life and therefore cannot be ignored when planning for sustainable development in the town.
Summary of Findings:

35.2% (209) of the households sampled were urban farmers; 160 (26.9%) urban crop cultivators; and 121 (20.4%) urban livestock keepers.

The major reason for urban farming was not only the need for extra/additional food but also for income. However, crop cultivation is more of a subsistence nature than livestock keeping, especially among the urban poor.

Looked at broadly, there were hardly any differences between the income groups as far as the reasons for crop cultivation and livestock keeping are concerned.

The most common types of crops cultivated include maize, kales (sukuma wiki), beans, onions, spinach, tomatoes, irish potatoes, cowpeas, bananas and saget. Mixed cropping was very common among the farmers.

The plots used for cultivation were located in the farmers’ own compounds – indicating “on-plot” cultivation. The ownership of the plots ranged from farmers’ own plot; landlord owned; and/or government land. A large majority of these plots were within a distance of ten minutes walk.

The harvest of the various crops was relatively modest in terms of kilograms, with a higher percentage contributed from the households in high-income category.

Almost all the crop cultivators used at least one type of fertilizer. However, organic manure either from one’s own farm or a neighbours farm was common. The use of chemical fertilizer, pesticides and/or insecticides was not very widespread.

Irrigation was practised by almost half of the cultivators. The use of tap water was common among the households. There was minimal use of untreated (sewage) water – only one respondent reported this.

Only 10 (6.3%) of the crop cultivators had received technical assistance either from extension officer, CDN programme and/or relatives.

Among the poor households, both the household head (37.5%) and spouse (50.6%) was responsible for crop cultivation. However, only 14% indicated that crop cultivation was a full time job.

Apart from the typical problems related to farming, theft of crops amongst the urban poor households was a major urban related constraint to crop cultivation.

The most important livestock kept were chicken, cattle, goats, ducks and sheep. Although most of the animals are reared for both self-consumption and selling, chicken were most important as a source of income.

Animals are either reared within the livestock keepers’ own compound and/or left freely outside. However, free range rearing system was common amongst the low-income households.

The use of inputs and technical assistance for livestock keeping was common with large animals and also among the well-to-do households.

Just like in crop cultivation, both the household head and the spouse were responsible for livestock keeping. Only 16% of the livestock keepers reared animals as a full-time job. In most cases and especially in high-income households, additional labour was sought.

Animals’ health is by far the greatest concern for farmers. However, lack of feed and safe drinking water is much more a problem for large livestock keepers and a threat of predators for small animals.

A large majority of the livestock keepers dump the animals’ waste in the street. This is common with small animals among the poorest households. However, 62% of the livestock keepers were able to recycle their wastes for crop cultivation either by themselves or by their neighbours.
Among the “non-farmers”, lack of access to land within the municipality is by far the most important reason for not engaging in urban farming. This indicates that if given access to land, a higher percentage of Nakurians would be practising urban agriculture.

Over 60% of the households have multi-spatial livelihoods. This indicates that rural plots are an important livelihood source for the Nakuru townspeople.

Contrary to what is mentioned in the literature so far and to what is generally thought, quite a number (almost 30%) of those rural plots are not located in the home area of the Nakuru townspeople.

For most of the ‘rural farmers’ in Nakuru town, the rural plots are a source of food; for many others it is also a source of income. However, for quite a number (20%) it appeared to be neither a food nor an income source.

Districts around the town have a higher percentage of “rural farmers” than in the districts further away.

Not all Nakuru households have equally access to rural land. For instance, low-income households are underrepresented among the households with multi-spatial livelihoods. Moreover, their rural plots are usually smaller and they are less often the owners of the plots.

In terms of ‘necessity’ and ‘opportunity’, urban farming can be considered as a necessity (to maintain a certain level of living), while rural farming is more of an opportunity related to the question whether one happens to have access to a piece of land (mostly through marriage or inheritance) in the rural areas or not.

Conclusions:

The importance of urban farming amongst the Nakuru townspeople cannot be underscored. Despite the fact that crop cultivation is subsistence in nature, source of (additional) income from the sale of crops and especially livestock was mentioned as an important reason for practising urban farming. The subsistence nature of urban farming could be because of the plot sizes, ownership of plots, most farmers using rented houses, urban farming not being a full-time occupation and land tenure. As could be expected, the contribution of urban crop cultivation to household’s food consumption is larger among the urban poor who are grappling with the current economic situation in the country. This can be supported by the fact that crop cultivation in Nakuru at the present scale seems to a recent phenomenon of the 1980s.

There is need, especially in Nakuru for a comprehensive study on urban farming in order to meet its vision of an “eco-town”. Urban agriculture is a fact of life which cannot be ignored when planning for sustainable urban planning and development.