Abstract

Urban agriculture, described as any agricultural activity within the boundaries of an urban center encompassing all kinds of crop cultivation and animal husbandry is not a new phenomena rather it is as old as urbanization itself. Food production was an important phenomenon of both pre-industrial and industrial cities. During the last two decades, these activities have been on the increase in most developing countries and Africa in particular. However, in most African counties, Kenya included, urban agriculture is considered illegal. Local authority By-laws usually dating from the colonial times simply forbid any agricultural activity within the boundaries of urban centers. A large number of urban dwellers continue to practice urban agriculture, contrary to the By-laws, while urban managers and planners quietly ignore the practice. This study aimed at examining the relation between urban agriculture and development control with a case study of Machakos Municipality. The research methodology employed included the use of primary and secondary data. In the collection of data from the primary sources, structured questionnaires and scheduled interviews for 100 households (70 Farming and 30 Non farming) and 30 market traders dealing with agricultural produce were used. Secondary data was collected from among others, Machakos District Physical Planning Office, Agriculture Office, Machakos Municipal Council Offices. Other tools applied included informal discussions, personal observation, and photography. The data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) after which outputs generated were used as input in Microsoft excel to generate graphs and charts. Analysed data was then presented using frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs. The study found out that, the practice of urban agriculture in Machakos municipality is prohibited by the Public Health Act cap 242. The Local Government Act cap 265 and General nuisance by-laws, 1999 amendments. The Physical Planning Act of 1996 does not recognize the activity as one of the urban land uses and subjects every land including private land to planning. Furthermore, these legislations appear to conflict with other land related Acts such as the Registration of Titles Act Cap 281 which give conditional powers to the owner of land, and the Registered Land Act Cap 300. Despite the existence of such legislations that should guide planning and growth of the town, 98 percent of the households interviewed were not aware of their existence. It was established that, the practice is not confined to individual households as both government; religious and educational institutions are involved. Several factors were found to encourage the practice among them large family sizes, lengthy period of urban residence, and availability of open space. The activity was found to play a significant role in the municipality's economy. It provides domestic food supply (74 percent of the households interviewed produced crops for subsistence purpose) Besides, it conserves soil, utilizes urban waste and has greening effect among others. In terms of development control with regard to agriculture, it was found out that the municipal council does not sensitize the residents on the existence of planning legislations and majority are not aware, there is lack of enforcement of the same, apparent conflicts in the existing legislations governing ownership and use of land, Lack of zoning By-laws and an approved Local Physical Development Plan to guide development and provision of infrastructure. It was also found that UA has significant influence on the towns shape and rate of growth. The study concludes that urban agriculture is practiced out of a 'felt need'. Although gazettment of the peri urban areas render it illegal, people continue to practice it. Local authorities rarely develop infrastructure in the peri-urban areas due to lack of a Local Physical Development Plan that could influence the residents to change the use of land. The incorporation of the
peri-urban areas into the urban areas does not revoke the special conditions for use of land formally in the rural areas. The Registration of Titles Act cap 281 allow agriculture in the formally rural areas while the PPA of 1996 and the General Nuisance By-laws prohibit the activity in the newly incorporated land. It is on this basis that the study recommends that municipal boundaries should not be extended arbitrary by the Minister for Local government. The local authority should before hand prepare a local physical development plan and zoning schemes for the periurban area to determine the minimum acceptable land sizes and form the basis for provision of infrastructure. Integration of agriculture to the urban system arises from its potential in future to feed the municipality and includes sensitization of the local community on the dangers of using raw sewer and industrial effluent to produce crops, the need to conserve the environmentally fragile areas and employment of an agricultural officer by the local authority to manage farming. There is need for civic education to sensitize the residents on the existence and importance of planning law and by-laws. The laws that govern the use and planning of land should be harmonized to facilitate the integration of agriculture to the urban system. UA if properly promoted has potential to contribute significantly to the Government's policy of proper urban development.