

HOW CAN AGROECOLOGY HELP TO TRANSFORM LEFT OVER OPEN SPACE IN TOWNSHIP AREAS SUCH AS KWAMASHU

Presenter: Helge Mehrrens, eThekweni Municipality, Go! Durban

Supervisor: Gary Cullen, Economic Development and Planning

Transformation in a nutshell

The research is part of the Bridge City/KwaMashu Open Space Project, which is a public space improvement initiative with the aim to upgrade the interconnecting public green spaces by implementing multiple sub-projects. The vision for this transformation process of left over space is a regional park, where citizens feel safe and enjoy being. Agroecology was identified as important in terms of resilience, food security and sustainable living. It could help some of the most vulnerable households to gain food sovereignty. Therefore it is necessary to gain a better understanding of importance, community acceptance and possible implementation of Agroecology within the public open space in KwaMashu.

In recent years eThekweni Municipality has highlighted the importance of urban agriculture and has initiated projects and research around this topic. An agricultural unit was formally established in 2009. Since 2013 attention was drawn towards the city's food security challenge. Conferences followed. A strong Agroecology Programme was designed.

The Programme focusses on a four level support from a social level (food security for the vulnerable households), to socio-economic level (communal gardens and cooperatives), to the two highest semi-commercial focused levels (mini-farms, contract growing and niche projects). Strategically sited Support Hubs have been developed, as part of the strategy.

October 2015 eThekweni signed a strategic municipal food security coordination partnership with "Food and Trees for Africa". However this partnership focusses on the entrepreneurial site of agriculture in the Municipality. The engaged farms are more often situated in the rural areas of eThekweni.

Within the denser township areas with less accessible land reserves there is a need to research and develop an area based model in alliance with the Agroecology Programme, but customized and more suitable for these particular highly urbanized areas. Here small scale subsistence farming without market access dominates. Different Departments and NGOs already have a broad understanding of the needs and problems these communities are facing. Other basic analysis is still not available, such as a database describing people farming and areas occupied. And even less is known about a possible interest that other community members, currently not undertaking any form of farming, may have.

Key components

It is within the Bridge City / KwaMashu Open Space Project's scope to integrate Agroecology in the Open Space development and management scheme. This has a planning and a management component:

- the planning document has to

- firstly identify suitable areas within the open space for Agroecology based on knowledge of needed size, legal ties, need for infrastructure, soil, water accessibility and others
- and secondly the planning document should incorporate and secure this specific overall layer within the integrated plan
- A community based and customized management scheme will respond to the specific needs of Agroecology in township areas and identify roles and responsibilities of different key players such as the communities, councillors, NGOs and different Departments.

Stakeholder feedback, field studies and research identified a need for further area based analysis and stakeholder engagement within the project context to develop a customized Agroecology strategy for township areas such as KwaMashu/Bridge City.

Baseline research

- Socio-economic survey: existing agriculture and active community members in the open space within the project area: Extent, number, motivation, age group, status of recognition (informal, right to occupy) others
- Mapping the existing initiatives with background information from the survey and in accordance to the land use schemes and other regulatory restrictions
- Socio-economic survey of possible interest from people not active in agriculture: Possible interest and what would encourage Agroecology

Results will be translated into a community based strategy:

- Include the community experience in the strategy development process
- Identify roles and needs of key players in a first strategic paper

Translation of the strategy into a first plan and a community based and customized management scheme through a series of workshops and meetings with target groups and key players. The community based management will then be tested on the ground, evaluated and integrated into a revised strategy.

Benefits to eThekweni Municipality

The Agroecology Programme promotes appropriate and sustainable approaches to the way in which agriculture in eThekweni is planned and implemented. The vision is “food sovereignty (...) and a thriving urban and rural agriculture sector that significantly contributes to:

- The health and well-being of eThekweni residents
- Climate change mitigation and resilience
- Environmental sustainability”.

eThekweni Municipality will benefit from this research, because it will answer questions, of how this could be done in the high density township areas.

Summary

The research, as part of a township based Open Space Project, is based on the assumption, that agroecology could be important in terms of resilience, food security and sustainable living. The research tries to answer the question, how a customized agroecology model for the highly urbanized areas such as the Bridge City/KwaMashu precinct could be established.