

## CHAPTER I

### Revealing Social Dimensions of Open Space Cultivation by Older Women in Harare

ADVANCING A SOCIAL PLANNING DISCOURSE FOR UA

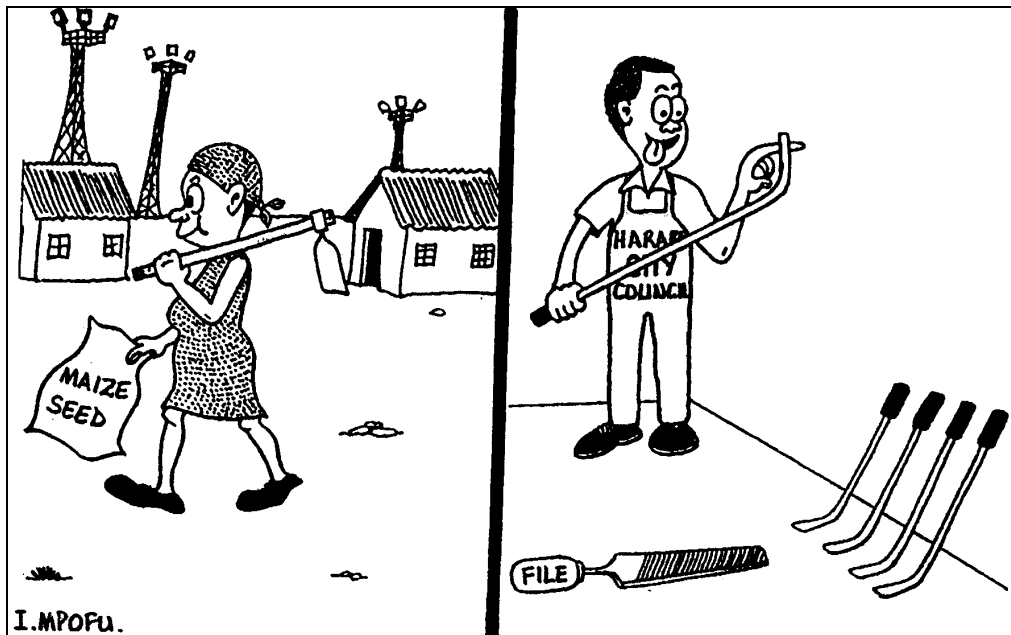


Figure 1.1 Cartoon title: Preparations, *The Herald*, May 26, 2000

## INTRODUCTION

It is believed that urban cultivation in Zimbabwe dates back to the formation of the first colonial cities (Mudimu 2001). Within the last decade, the practice has gained greater importance within Harare due to increasing urban food insecurity, concerns over environmental degradation of land and water, competition from other land uses and its popularity as a long standing practice to residents. Few attempts have been made to contextualise, or explain the practice of open space cultivation before the 1990s, which

had been largely predominated by women. The cartoon introducing this chapter portrays a woman going off to her urban field, while a city official sharpens his scythe in preparation of receiving his maize slashing orders from the City, capturing a well known and enduring conflict between the largely male City officials and black women farmers. As of 2002, there were no policies that specifically addressed the needs of black women who produce food on open spaces, nor specific strategies to incorporate them into the decision making processes or policy circles that were underway to legalise the practice.

Despite its long history as a land use, local authorities and planners had not recognised urban agriculture (UA) as a legitimate practice or land-use within the city, citing economic efficiency, environmental, safety and aesthetic reasons (Mbiba 2000, 1995, 1994, Gumbo 2000, Bowyer-Bower et al. 1996, ENDA 1997, Drakakis-Smith, Bowyer-Bower and Tevera 1995). Further, the over emphasis on physical and formal sector planning, regulation, control, and enforcement have created tensions between women cultivators and city authorities, especially when city authorities slash maturing maize crops (Mudimu 1996, Mbiba 1995, ENDA 1997, Martin, Oudwater and Meadows 2000, Rakodi 1995). The research and data shared in this thesis explores in greater depth, possible explanations for the enduring conflicts between “Farming Mothers”, the largely women cultivators and the “Founding Fathers”, the predominantly male city decision makers pre and post independence in Harare. Stories of black women and urban open space cultivation have not really been told or explained yet despite the long history of urban residency by women, a further indicator of the marginalisation of women as history makers, as academics, as city and community builders. Zimbabwe represents a young and

emerging democracy (twenty-five years old) where the legacy of authoritarianism, imperialism, and race- and class-based conflicts have a strong influence on what happens at the local level today. Women's participation in creating democratic institutions and processes is severely constrained by cultural, legal, economic and political practices that subordinate their status to that of men within and outside the home. Women have been systematically excluded from formal sites of power and influence. Within this context, it does not seem that surprising to uncover sites of women's resistance. Women's increasing participation in open space cultivation, despite its ambiguous and illegal status as a form of land use, captures rather poignantly the gendered struggle of women in asserting their influence in two economic, cultural and domestic realms: food provisioning and motherhood. Far from just representing an urban land use or occupation for women in Harare, urban open space cultivation also represents a symbolic struggle between men and women that is historically and culturally rooted.

This thesis not only tries to expose and explain these gendered relationships that form integral aspects of urban agricultural systems in Harare; it also broadens the conceptualisation and definition of urban agriculture within the field more generally. As developed and applied within this thesis, UA could equally be defined as a cultural and social process that involves the use of urban and peri-urban land by citizens, organisations, governments and the private sector for agricultural and agricultural related purposes. UA is reflective of cultural and social processes that convey the historical development of cities, revealing through land use an urban environment composed of many inter-related and complex social, economic, environmental, political dynamics. UA

is also a site of inquiry into the relationships between humans and our built and natural environments, as well as between our bureaucracies and institutions, illuminating stories that often remain hidden or unacknowledged in prominent accounts of city formation. Additionally, like UA and cities, processes are dynamic and evolve over time, whereas activities represent more discrete mechanisms for categorisation and classification, at times lending themselves to oversimplification and reductionism.

## **DEFINITIONS**

For those who already know that agriculture is, and has been for centuries, an activity carried out in many cities around the globe the pairing of the words urban and agriculture represents not only an accurate designation of one of many urban functions in cities, but also a highly complex, diversified and contested area of ‘lived experience’ and academic inquiry (Mougeot 2000a, Smit et al. 1996, Hough 1995, Mougeot 1994a, Lee-Smith and Memon 1994, Eisler 1987, Mumford, 1961).

The academic study of UA, and UA’s subsequent uptake into the agendas of the international development industry can be traced to research undertaken in the 1950s by Vennetier in the Congo (Mougeot 1994c). Writings and research under the umbrella of urban and peri-urban agriculture (UA) are extensive, in terms of focus and volume. They have touched upon areas as diverse as waste management, food security, land tenure, animal husbandry, health and nutrition, urban ecology, water resource management and urban planning and governance. In fact, almost any aspect that one could think of within

the domain of ‘urban’ issues could be explored with respect to urban agriculture in some way or another.<sup>1</sup>

Descriptions of urban agriculture have become quite extensive to date; many of them define the practice of UA as an activity or an industry. A widely known and referenced definition of UA is: “an industry that produces, processes and markets food and fuel, largely in response to the daily demand of consumers within town, city or metropolis, on land and water dispersed throughout the urban and peri-urban area, applying intensive production methods, using and reusing natural resources and urban wastes, to yield a diversity of crops and livestock” (Smit et al., 1996, 3). A variety of similarly conceptualised definitions also exist.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis proposes that UA is not just an activity or industry, but a cultural process infused with an elaborate entanglement of gender relations and dynamics, race politics, as well as social and class strife, a definition that may help to encourage greater depth and reach in our descriptive and analytical accounts, and our approaches to welcoming and integrating UA within our cities. This expansion (not a replacement) of the more common definition of UA creates more avenues from which to explore the meaning and functions of cities, as well as the meaning and functions of UA to real people. This research provides a different conceptualisation of urban open space cultivation based on such a definition of UA, building new constructs with which to

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<sup>1</sup> Key books on UA include Bakker, Nico, et al. (2000), *Growing Cities, Growing Food: UA on the Policy Agenda*; Koc, Mustafa, et al. (1999), *For Hunger Proof Cities*, Smit et al. (1996), *UA: Food Jobs and Sustainable Cities*; Egziabher, Axumite, et al. (1994), *Cities Feeding People: An Examination of Urban Agriculture in East Africa*, as well as the *Urban Agriculture Magazine* produced by RUAF.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Quon’s (1999) compendium of definitions of UA for further reference.

interpret the ways that women, and their use of open spaces for cultivation, have shaped urbanisation in Harare.

The term Urban Agriculture as applied in Zimbabwe has generally been defined according to location (Mbiba 1995). The categories are on-plot, off-plot, and peri-urban agriculture (Mbiba 1995, ENDA 1997, Mudimu et al. 1996). This research looks at a specific type of off-plot cultivation, which I have called Subsistence Open Space Cultivation (SOSC). The term helps to differentiate between various forms of off-plot cultivation that occurs in Harare, notably those between income/class, race groupings, and orientation to local markets and exports. SOSC is a form of off-plot agriculture that entails the cultivation of subsistence food crops and staples, primarily maize and vegetables, for household consumption, on undeveloped public or private land that is not legally owned by the person cultivating, by those who are of the landless, working poor and of black African populations. Therefore, within this research the term UA will be used to discuss the field of urban agriculture more generally, and SOSC will be used when directly speaking about the particular type of urban agriculture upon which this study is focused.

## **RESEARCH FOCUS**

As food is being considered no longer a basic need but a luxury for the urban poor (Mougeot 1994a, 1994c), it is no surprise that low income groups and the poor are engaged in UA, and in most cases are over represented in proportion to other income groups (Mougeot 1999b, Smit, Ratta and Nasr 1996, IDRC 1998). This is particularly noted in UA papers focused on African cities (Mougeot 1994c, Sawio 1993, Foeken and

Mwangi 2000, Lee-Smith and Memon 1994, Wekwete 1993, Greenhow 1994). Research has concluded that economic necessity is making various forms of UA a survival strategy of the poor and low-income households.<sup>3</sup> Some segments of the population engage in UA because they have no other means available to them, and are considered marginalised or distinct groups in the literature. These groups are often categorised as very low income, the poorest, as female headed households, widows, families abandoned by the primary wage earner, the land insecure, or simply as 'women' (Maxwell 1994, Foeken and Mwangi 2000, Kreinecker 2000, Smit, Ratta and Nasr, Bradford et al 2002, Nunan 2000).

It has long been recognised in many countries, particularly within Sub-Saharan Africa, that women predominate in UA systems as farmers, on or off-plot.<sup>4</sup> UA has been considered within the literature a major economic sector that generates jobs and income for women (Smit, Ratta and Nasr 1996, Wekwete 1993, Lee-Smith and Memon 1994). Often the involvement of women in UA is discussed as overlapping or complementing women's reproductive responsibilities within the home, such as childcare and food provisioning.<sup>5</sup> Some case studies suggest that in households where women are involved in UA, more resources go into the home, and children are ensured better access to food

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Sawio 1994b, Egziabher 1994, Jacobi et al 2000, Kreinecker 2000, Smit, Ratta and Nasr 1996, Chimbowu and Gumbo 1993, Gupta 2002, Atukunda 1998, Greenhow 1994, Lamba 1993, Sawio 1993, IDRC 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to Mbiba 2000, 1995, Mudimu 1996, Foeken and Mwangi 2000, Nunan 2000, Tinker 1994, Sawio 1994b, Sawio 1993, Buechler, Devi and Rashid 2002, Bradford et al. 2002a, Drescher 1999, Lee-Smith and Lamba 1998, Maxwell et al. 1998, Smit 1996, Sawio 1994a, Bohrt 1993, Lamba 1993, Yasmeen 2001, Strieffeler 1987, Smit, Ratta and Nasr 1996, Kreinecker 2000, Maxwell 1994, Lee-Smith and Memon 1994, Atukunda 1998, Kaspersma 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Lima et al. 2000, Lee-Smith and Memon 1994, Lee-Smith and Lamba 1998, Yasmeen 2001, Mougeot 2000a, Mougeot 1999a, Sawio 1994b, Hovorka 2001, Mawoneke and King 1998, Jacobi, Amend and Kiango 2000, Sachs and Silks 1985.

and better nutrition (Drescher 1999, Smit, Ratta and Nasr 1996, Yasmeeen 2001, Kreinecker 2000, Mougeot 1999a, Streiffeler 1987, Esrey and Anderson 2001).<sup>6</sup>

Lee-Smith and Memon (ibid., 83) contend that urban farming is “one of the ways the domestic economy functions for survival in modern Africa. The domestic economy of the urban poor is an intricate mix of productive and reproductive activities. No urban programs, policy or planning can work without an understanding of the complex character of this economy”. Many cities however create further barriers to urban cultivation in general and women’s cultivation in particular by designating UA an illegal activity, providing no resources or access to a land use that is deemed important to women (Lamba 1993). Some researchers suggest that the neglect of UA is perhaps correlated with the domination of women within this sector and hence, urban agriculture and the productive work of women become economically marginalised or trivialised (Lee-Smith and Memon 1994, Mbiba 1995). Such conclusions have also been drawn by Horn (1994, 1997) in her research of women’s marketing and vending of produce in Harare.

Moreover, the UA literature is abundant with references to the constraints women face in undertaking UA<sup>7</sup>, in particular their challenges to securing land access and title. In Zimbabwe, Moyo (1995, 15) claims that “indeed women constitute a sizeable proportion of the landless within urban areas of Zimbabwe”. Gaidzanwa (1992) and Mgugu (in

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<sup>6</sup> For example, during household surveys conducted in 1996 to 1997 in Harare and Gweru (Zimbabwe), growth rates (measuring height and weight) of children under five years were found to be greater for children of urban farmers than children of non-farming households (Mawoneke and King 1998).

<sup>7</sup> See Spies 1998, Hovorka 1998, Quon 1998, van Hirtum, Goewie and Getachew 2002, Lima et al 2000, Cavric and Mosha 2001, Lamba 1993, Hasna 1998, Mawoneke and King 1998, Smit, Ratta and Nasr 1996,

CORE 2001) also confirm the challenges black Zimbabwean women face in obtaining land in cities. Despite all these challenges, women in Harare, through their social networks, have created and sustained an urban land tenure system on open spaces for at the very least, fifty years.

Although there are many writings, and casual references to gender in the literature on urban agriculture, very little attention has been given to gender analysis, especially gender relations and dynamics. As noted by Martin, Oudwater and Gündel in their comprehensive review of methodologies used in urban agriculture research (2002, 10) “Methodologies for exploring gender relations and urban agriculture are discussed in surprisingly little of the literature (Slater, 2001), although the predominance of women in the agricultural labour force is well documented”. Hasna (1998) and Hovorka (1998, 2001) have developed reviews on gender and UA<sup>8</sup>, both prompting for more work to discuss why and how gender relations are implicated in UA. Hovorka (2001) advocates that future UA research should address geographic scale and difference. Geographic scale refers not only to intra-household gender relations but also “organisational, legal and political structures and ideas that reinforce gender differences and inequalities” (Hovorka *ibid.*, 170). Difference can be recognised in research by addressing how gender, class, age, culture, race, as well as other important concepts influence context specific conditions. In Harare, Zimbabwe, UA research has just scratched the surface of applying some of these more complex axes of analysis.

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Lee-Smith and Lamba 1998, Mougeot 1999a, Nugent 2000, IDRC 1998; Bradford, Brook and Hunshal 2002

The works of Mbiba (1995, 2000) and Mudimu (1996) sought in part to raise awareness of women's participation in SOSC in Harare. Research on UA in Harare has well established the importance of the practice in terms of its economic benefits to households (Gumbo 2000, ENDA 1997, Mudimu, Siziba and Hanyani-Mlambo 1998). There is however a need to undertake more systematic research into how the practice and impacts of UA are embedded within gendered socio-cultural contexts, political institutions, systems of governance, and planning practice. This research thus aims to address the following questions.

1. What are the broader historical, political, economic and cultural contexts, and their gender implications and impacts that have shaped the practice of urban agriculture, particularly the struggles and conflicts between predominantly women cultivators – the “Farming Mothers” – and the largely male city officials – “the Founding Fathers” in Harare?
2. What are older black women's experiences of subsistence open space cultivation in the city? In particular, how do they experience city policies, various forms of discrimination to land ownership and tenure, and barriers to continued cultivation? What forms of social networks and socio-economic strategies have they been using to counter such barriers and policies?
3. What are the self-defined realities and needs of women who engage in subsistence open space cultivation in Harare? How can we situate women's self-defined realities

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<sup>8</sup> Hasna;s (1998) review included overviews on UA research and NGO involvement in the African cities of Harare, Kampala and Accra.

and needs within the broader social, cultural, economic, political, governance and planning structures and relationships?

4. What alternative forms of gender-aware planning, policies and recommendations might be appropriate to promote UA as a legitimate form of livelihood strategy of women and the urban poor in the City of Harare?

These research questions are addressed in the next chapters organised as follows:

### **Chapter Two: A Methodology For Uncovering Social Contexts In UA Systems**

Chapter two explains the theoretical and epistemological framework of this research. Ethnomethodology and participatory research methodologies were used to define and complement the utilisation of a feminist methodology as an overall framework of this study. A multi-method approach was adopted, and included the use of semi-structured interviewing, focus groups, strategic meetings, participatory methods, visioning interviews and action methods (such as field trips, creating a stakeholder forum, and organising income generating projects).

### **Chapter Three: Making Women Visible: A Long History Of Women and Open Space Cultivation in Harare, Zimbabwe**

Chapter three attempts to write a gendered history of women and UA in Harare. This chapter contextualises the practice of SOSC by sharing current and historical information about Zimbabwe, Harare and the neighbourhood where the women live. The chapter introduces the women and their migration from their rural homes and their agricultural backgrounds, to Harare, documenting their lengthy urban residency and the beginnings of their cultivation activities.

#### **Chapter Four: At The Neighbourhood Scale, There Is Strength In Enterprising Women**

The women's support and friendship networks are described in this chapter, revealing the ways women have gained access to work, fields and incomes outside the home, and the importance this work has played to the well being of their households, even today when they are respectfully considered 'old'. It provides more detail of the customary land tenure system created by some urban women, and discusses the different ways the women access land. Key findings show that the open space cultivation developed by these women is indeed 'organised', and that such forms of organisation have been historically unacknowledged, ignored, and impeded by those with decision making power, most often male elites.

#### **Chapter Five: Women's Harvests, Technical Constraints and Requirements in Urban Farming**

The cultivation activities of seven women and their self-identified needs during their 2001 harvests are discussed. The chapter highlights the diversity of activities that are affiliated with undertaking open space cultivation, the amounts the women harvested and shared, the financial costs and challenges to undertaking cultivation on open spaces.

#### **Chapter Six: Policy and Local Governance Issues: Women, Cultivation and Confrontation**

This chapter discusses the legal channels available for SOSOC in Harare, dispelling the myth that UA is an illegal activity in the City. The impacts of legal ambiguity have resulted in land conflicts between various SOSOC land tenure systems and categories and these are elaborated upon to demonstrate the serious governance challenges at the heart

of supportive policy development for UA in the City. The voices of women are used to illuminate the dire need for local and neighbourhood level leadership, and the importance of addressing the cultural context in which SOSC is imbedded. Chapter six incorporates findings from over thirty professionals working within the municipality, non-governmental organisations (NGO's), academia and national government, 81% of whom were men.

### **Chapter Seven: Planning, Governance & Power: Grounds for Insurgency**

A background on colonial and post colonial planning is provided in chapter seven to situate the type of planning undertaken in Harare and the exclusionary practices that operate to make the work of women, SOSC and land based livelihoods invisible in planning practice and city decision making. Further, this chapter also shows the potential for shifting planning practice and discourse toward more progressive forms.

### **Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The chapter highlights findings from each of the chapters. Chapter eight also contributes recommendations related to key findings and shares ideas of how modest interventions could help to build up weakened local governance institutions by involving older women, addressing the cultural and social dimensions of SOSC and UA, and utilising the strengths that already exist in communities and the diverse forms of organisation found in the city.

## **RESEARCH CONTEXT & PARTICIPANTS**

### Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe gained its independence from the ruling minority of British white settlers in 1980. It has a population of 12.6 million people, and an annual population growth rate of about 1%<sup>9</sup> (CIA World Fact Book 2004), with 37% of the population living in urban areas (UNICEF 2004). Agriculture is a leading sector, contributing 40% to export earnings, while 60% of Zimbabwe's industry is agriculturally based (CORE 2001). Land in Zimbabwe is categorised into seven land tenure categories: resettlement areas, communal areas, state owned farms, national parks and forests, large scale commercial farms (freehold), small scale commercial farms (state land) (CORE 2001), and urban areas. Approximately 8.4% of the land is arable (CIA World Fact Book 2004). There are indigenous ethnic divisions that influence the country's political and cultural climate. In very broad terms, the country has two main ethnic groupings, the Shona (82%), and the Ndebele (14%). Other ethnic populations include a small white population (less than 1%), mixed race and Asian descent (1%), as well as other African ethnic groups (2%).

One of the most cited reasons for the increase in urban food production in Zimbabwe is attributed to national economic hardships arising from the structural adjustment programs (SAP's) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank that were put in place in the early 1990's (Drakakis-Smith, Bowyer-Bower and Tevera 1995, Mudimu 1996). Since then, the controversial fast track land resettlement program, the land occupations on white owned farms by war veterans that began in 1999, and the drought conditions in recent years, (as well as a host of other topical issues) have contributed to increasing political and economic strife, as well as

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<sup>9</sup> This national population growth rate is quite low and reflects the devastating impacts of deaths from

human and food insecurity across the country. It is estimated that food access remains very difficult for 2.5 million urban people (Moyo 2004). There is also the tragedy of 1800 to 3000 Zimbabweans losing their lives to HIV/AIDS every week (Moyo 2004), as well as from TB, malaria, hunger and malnutrition, reducing the life expectancy at birth to only 38 years old (CIA World Fact Book 2004).



Map 1 (CIA World Fact Book 2004)

### Harare: The Field Research Site

Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe and is home to just under 2 million people (World Gazetteer 2004). The city has a compact downtown that practically shuts down for the night as there are no urban residential high-rises within this almost exclusive commercial and business core. There are tree-lined streets, a formal town square with

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HIV/AIDS, and its related illnesses, such as tuberculosis and pneumonia.

public fountain found outside the parliamentary buildings and the ritzy Miekles Hotel. There are generous public gardens in close walking distance to places where public gatherings and concerts are hosted. In 2000 and 2001, Harare was still managing to host wonderful international, regional and national cultural events, such as the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, the Zimbabwe Agricultural Fair, the Zimbabwe National Jazz Festival and the Zimbabwe International Film Festival. The streets are not overly congested but in the southern parts of downtown, there is a visible increase in the number of people, street vendors and public markets. Generally, suburbs are categorised as high-density, medium density and low density, correlating with an inverse relationship with income. These suburbs have a geographical division with high-density suburbs located in the west and south of the city, and the low-density suburbs occupying the northern portions of the city. While most ethnic groups are represented in the medium and low-density suburbs, high-density suburbs are generally home to the majority of the black Zimbabwean population.

Although Zimbabwe has a predominantly rural population, rural-to-urban migration has become a serious issue for Harare as it grapples with a growth rate between 5 and 7% (ZWRCN–SARDC 1998) as well as a chronic housing shortage (Mbiba 1995). Unfortunately, this rate increased rapidly in 2002 as a result of internal displacement from drought and political and economic instability, conditions that have continued into 2004. In recent reports, trends show inward movement of people from rural areas due to political violence, and outward migration from Harare to new resettlement areas, as well as to avoid high rentals in urban areas (FOSENET NGO Food Security Network 2004).

In the past few years, food prices have soared due to numerous factors including, political, environmental and social crises. Prices of some staple commodities, like tomatoes and rape, were known to rise more than 100% in the course of just one week in 2001(Financial Gazette 2001a, 2001b). Maize meal prices were ten times higher in January 2004 than they were in January 2003 (FOSENET NGO Food Security Network, 2004, 5), and at times people had to either queue, or purchase it at much higher prices on the parallel market due to its lack of availability. Other commodities such as sugar, oil, washing soap, and bread are now unaffordable for many low-income families. There are both fuel and currency shortages that have literally destabilised and closed many businesses, thereby increasing the numbers of unemployed men and women. Unemployment rates in the country range from 70% to 80% (CIA World Fact Book 2004). During the 1990s open space cultivation has increased as a means of dealing with these shortages and hardships. Mbiba (2000) claims in recent years that the poor and vulnerable groups are being pushed out from opportunities to engage in open space cultivation by higher income groups whose standards of living have been collapsing. These trends continue to occur, and land conflicts and land grabbing are being witnessed in the city, creating worrisome trends.

### Research Participants

The fieldwork was carried out in two five month visits to Harare, Zimbabwe from August 2000- December 2000, and May 2001- September 2001. During my second field visit in 2001, I worked as an intern with the Municipal Development Programme for Eastern and Southern Africa within their Urban Agriculture Programme. Research was

conducted with a group of seven urban women farmers, most of whom were in their middle to late 50s. Interviews and focus group discussions with these women were conducted with the help of several research assistants who speak the local dialects and have professional and academic experience. On the surface, this group of women might appear to some as homogeneous, as they are all black Africans similar in age, resided in their own homes<sup>10</sup>, lived within several blocks of one another, cultivated in the city, and four of the seven were the heads of their households. As the research methods permitted close and continuous association, various differences in life histories, personalities, adversities, interests and visions began to emerge. I advocated for and with these women, given my opportunities to participate within professional and policy forums that permitted access to over fifty professionals, academics and government employees. The study also incorporates findings from meetings and interviews with over thirty professionals, including eleven individuals with planning backgrounds. I also had local NGO and academic partners, as well as a team of five research assistants (profiles are located in Appendix 1). The methodological framework used and issues encountered in this research are further explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>10</sup> I can not claim these women were home owners as many women in Zimbabwe do not have the title in their own names