



EPA Forum 2019

UTILIZING EVIDENCE TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY
AND NUTRITION IN URBAN AREAS

GOLDEN TULIP 



17-18

October 2019

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www.epanetwork.org



Netherlands Organisation
for Scientific Research



About the EPA Forum

The **Evidence Policy Action** Forum (EPA Forum) is an initiative of the EPA Network that aims to support the utilization of evidence in designing policies and implementing interventions.

Evidence refers to data, research findings, and knowledge generated from evaluations of projects and programs.

The EPA Forum was initiated as a response to the lack of a functional platform that connects the evidence-production systems and the policy/practitioner community. Such dialog space is needed to (i) guide research on issues of interest for policymakers and practitioners, (ii) inform the private sector on innovations and facilitate the discovery-product transition, (iii) provide policymakers with inputs for more evidence-informed policies, and (iv) facilitate the uptake of research results and its mainstreaming into programs and projects. This helps break the existing information silo and connects the various relevant stakeholders for more integration and efficiency.

The EPA Forum aims to offer a platform for discussions and knowledge exchange between evidence-producers and policymakers and practitioners in the food, nutrition, and environment sectors. It is the largest national platform that brings together researchers, data specialists, evaluation experts, policymakers, and practitioners to

- ✔ Communicate research findings and other types of evidence to policymakers and practitioners;
- ✔ Connect researchers/inventors with investors and facilitate the transition of research from laboratories and research stations to markets;
- ✔ Exchange ideas on how evidence can be mainstreamed into policy and action;
- ✔ Identify opportunities for collaboration that help advance evidence-informed policymaking and practice.



Design by JMA PLUS

The EPA Forum is the most important annual gathering for evidence-producers, policymakers, and practitioners in the food security and environment sectors in Benin. It goes beyond policymaking and supports stakeholders in taking concrete actions based on rigorous evidence. Therefore, the Forum targets policymakers but also focuses on bringing on board practitioners including development partners, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to make them aware of available evidence and innovations that can be used in their interventions. The Forum also offers a platform for researchers to learn from real-life and practical questions and issues that are of interest to policymakers and practitioners to align their research agendas.

You can join the EPA Network at www.epanetwork.org

Theme of the EPA Forum 2019

The EPA Forum 2019 will focus on the theme: **“Utilizing Evidence to Improve Food Security and Nutrition in Urban Areas”**. The theme is justified by the urgent need to address more efficiently and sustainably the issue of food and nutrition in Benin. Indeed, the issue of food and nutrition security is complex with multifactorial and interdependent factors. As such, and in a context of scarce resources, persuasive and timely evidence is of critical importance and can improve the efficiency of decisions and interventions.

Food and nutrition vulnerability is a major issue in developing countries. In Benin, about 9.6% of the population, corresponding to about 1.09 million people, is in food insecurity (AGVSA, 2017¹). Although the situation is most alarming in rural areas, food insecurity in urban areas is worsened by degrading living conditions and has created new, vulnerable urban citizens named the “urban poor”.



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Indeed, the headcount poverty rate in urban areas in Benin is estimated to be 35.8%, corresponding to an increase of 0.6 points between 2011 and 2015 (INSAE, 2015²) and probably with the same trend for the following years. About 7% of urban households are living in a critical food situation and worsening living conditions.

Unlike the rural households for which different food shortage management strategies were available (home gardening, food banks, etc.), the “urban poor” have few or no options, including very limited access to agricultural land and limited access to social security systems. The urban poor situation is particularly remarkable in Southern Benin wherein 60% of the population is living in 16.65% of the national territory (INSAE, 2013)³. Therefore, Benin, with its increasing urbanization (47.3%⁴, one of the highest in West Africa) and rapidly expanding (bigger and newer) cities, should urgently develop sustainable solutions to address the food and nutrition situation of the urban poor.

Urban agriculture (UA) features prominently among the most viable interventions to address food insecurity in urban areas. UA is practiced by 800 million people worldwide and helps low-income urban residents save money on food purchases (FAO, accessed 2019⁵).



¹ AGVSA 2017. Analyse Globale de la Vulnérabilité et de la Sécurité Alimentaire, République du Bénin.

Programme Alimentaire Mondial des Nations Unies. Rome, Italie

² <https://www.insae-bj.org/images/docs/insae-publications/autres/Note-sur-la-pauvrete/Note%20sur%20la%20pauvrete-final.pdf>

³ INSAE. 2013. Resultats provisoires du RGPH4. Rapport.

⁴ <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/benin/population-and-urbanization-statistics/bj-urban-population--of-total-population>

⁵ <http://www.fao.org/urban-agriculture/ff/>

Roughly 15–20 percent of the world's food is grown in urban areas, a figure that is likely to increase as cities grow (Karanja and Njenga, 2011⁶). UA can contribute to food security and economic opportunity in low-income communities in cities worldwide.

UA can also provide socio-cultural and environmental benefits to local communities and improve the social status of women within households as well. This is also the case in Benin, where UA has been practiced for decades (FAO, 2012⁷). Although there are various forms of UA – home gardens, small husbandry, and small-scale forestry, allotment gardens are of particular interest. An allotment garden is defined as a plot of land made available to individuals or families for growing food (Barthel et al., 2010⁸). However, little is known about how these gardens are organized and affect the food security and income of their participants or about which constraints hinder the development of such gardens in the country. These issues are important to inform policymakers and practitioners for the successful development of UA and similar initiatives. For instance, in 2015, the Republic of Benin developed its National Strategic Development Plan of Peri-urban and Urban Agriculture to recognize and provide a policy framework for the development of UA. Recent research has shown that UA in Benin can improve food and nutrition security and the livelihoods of the urban poor. For example, with funding from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), a research consortium composed of the Centre d'Actions pour l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (ACED),

the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences of the University of Abomey-Calavi (FSA/UAC), and the Amsterdam Centre for World Food Studies of the VU University of Amsterdam (ACWFS/VU) has conducted extensive research on allotment gardens and their impact on the food security of the urban poor in Benin. This partnership has largely engaged policymakers, practitioners, and urban gardeners in Benin on the benefits and constraints facing UA implementation. It has overseen the development of two allotment garden pilots in two big cities – Cotonou and Porto-Novo – where 40 poor urban dwellers have been selected and trained in gardening to improve their food security and incomes. Among other results, the research revealed that:

- ✔ Most of the urban poor are food insecure;
- ✔ Allotment gardening in urban areas is profitable and can improve the food security of its participants;
- ✔ The vast majority of urban gardeners are members of a cooperative but, many decisions depend on an individual, and collective actions are restricted to vigilance and land acquisition;
- ✔ Lack of land and tenure insecurity, lack of financial capital, and lack of public authorities' commitment are the main constraints on the development of allotment gardens.

⁶ Karanja, N. and Njenga, M. (2011), 'State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet. Brief on Chapter 10, Feeding the Cities', Worldwatch Institute

⁷ FAO (2012), Growing greener cities in Africa. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

⁸ Barthel, S., Folke, C., & Colding, J. (2010). Social-ecological memory in urban gardens—Retaining the capacity for management of ecosystem services. *Global Environmental Change*, 20(2), 255–265.

The partnership recommended the development of a policy component that creates a shared perspective among the government and donor communities to position UA in development policies, a supporting component that builds capacities to fully exploit the cooperative organization, and a technical component that explores the possibilities of soil-less vertical farming as an added response to land scarcity. Other recommendations were for the private sector to promote contract farming to support allotment gardens and value chains development and for civil society organizations to provide appropriate training and support to the urban poor in gardening development so that their households can access fresh foods and increase their food security situation.

Furthermore, all studies conducted as part of this research recommended for policy-makers to encourage the youth to enter the gardening industry and reduce unemployment.

Objectives of the EPA Forum 2019

The overall goal of the Forum is to improve the use of evidence by policymakers and practitioners in the food security sector. Specifically, the EPA Forum 2019 will provide evidence-producers and users with a platform to discuss urban agriculture development and improve their engagement in implementing the research findings in Benin. The following objectives will be pursued:

- ✓ Inform the various stakeholders involved in the production and use of evidence on the EPA Network and its Forum;
- ✓ Engage policymakers and practitioners on the utilization of evidence to advance urban agriculture;
- ✓ Identify additional knowledge needs and facilitate collaborations for on-demand research in urban agriculture;
- ✓ Discuss the relevance and modalities of creating a Centre for Urban Food Systems.



Venue, date, and format **EPA Forum 2019**

The Forum will take place in Cotonou, Benin, at the Golden Tulip Hotel, on 17–18 October 2019. Over 200 representatives of government, non-state actors, development partners, international organizations, academia, private sector, and gardeners' associations will participate.

The following sessions will be organized to maximize interaction among participants and allow networking, exploration of issues, and sharing of knowledge.

Opening statements:

This session will feature the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Benin, and the Coordinator of the EPA Network. The session aims to clarify the overall framework of the EPA 2019 Forum, its relevance, and the linkage of the theme with the priorities of the government and development partners.

Keynotes:

Eminent experts will deliver keynotes on the need to accelerate the use of evidence in improving food and nutrition security and to strengthen urban food systems to reduce the poverty of the most vulnerable.

Panel discussions:

The panel will bring together representatives from research institutions, government, the private sector, and gardeners' associations to debate and exchange knowledge on the use of evidence and the challenges and opportunities of UA.

Breakaway sessions:

Groups of participants will work on various themes related to the EPA approach and UA. They will propose practical solutions for the development of urban agriculture and formulate modalities for the creation of a Centre for Urban Food Systems.

Field visit:

A site visit will be organized in Somè, Abomey-Calavi. Participants will have a guided tour of the site's facilities and will be able to interact with gardeners and local communities about the benefits and challenges of community gardening.

Scientific meeting:

Selected delegates from policymakers, practitioners, and researchers will participate in a scientific meeting that discusses policy-research perspectives on the development of UA and the management of urban food systems.

Register to share your knowledge and learn from others on the utilization of evidence to improve food security and nutrition.

Join us! www.epanetwork.org

The EPA Forum 2019 will be held in French and English with simultaneous interpretation.



To become a partner of the EPA Forum 2019, please write to contact@epanetwork.org

What does the **Forum** offer you?



Unique platform to engage in multi-stakeholder discussions on improving food security and nutrition in Benin.



Opportunity to communicate around your activities and increase your visibility. Partners will be highlighted in the communication materials of the Forum.

EVIDENCE **PARTNER**

01

If you produce data or research or evaluation results in the area of food security and nutrition, the EPA Forum 2019 provides you with a platform to share your findings and engage policymakers and practitioners for better use of evidence. You can organize a side event, deliver a communication, host an exhibition of your results.

POLICY **PARTNER**

02

The EPA Forum 2019 provides an opportunity for governmental and municipal departments, agencies, and institutions to engage directly with evidence-producers, including researchers, on the research and data they need to make informed decisions.

ACTION **PARTNER**

03

If you are in the private sector or you implement projects and programs in the area of food security and nutrition, you can become an Action Partner of the EPA Forum 2019 to share your practical knowledge with evidence-producers and policymakers.

BROKER **PARTNER**

04

Brokers provide a bridge between evidence-producers and users. They communicate available evidence to policymakers, practitioners, and the population. If you take on this role in the area of food security and nutrition, the EPA Forum 2019 is the platform to increase your impact and gain access to the latest research results and innovations that you can communicate to your audience.

WHAT CAN YOU BRING AS A PARTNER?

- **PARTICIPATE IN THE FORUM**

to contribute to exchanges around the use of evidence to improve food and nutrition security.

- **SUPPORT COMMUNICATION**

on the Forum for example by posting an article on your website or disseminating information related to the Forum on your online communication channels.

- **SPONSOR PARTICIPANTS**

Our current resources can support 100 participants at the Forum. Our ambition is to reach 250 participants. For the 150 additional participants you can support participants from your team or partners. You also can sponsor potential participants who have already registered for the Forum, but whom we can no longer support because of our current limited resources. The cost of a participant in the Forum is estimated at 35,000 FCFA (USD 60).

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